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ISSUE 09

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INCLUDING: OTOGI (XBOX), TRON 2.0 (PC), BOKTAI (GBA), BILLY HATCHER (GAMECUBE) AND HOCKEY. LOTS OF HOCKEY. PUCKIN' A

PAGE 63 FIRST REVIEW!

F-ZERO GX

SEGA TO NINTENDO: "I'LL BE YOUR WINGMAN ANYTIME"

PAGE 50 FIRST HANDS-ON!

MANHUNT: THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME?

ULTRAVIOLENCE FROM GTA'S CREATORS





UNITED AT BIRTH...



Alcohol Reference
Mild Language
Violence

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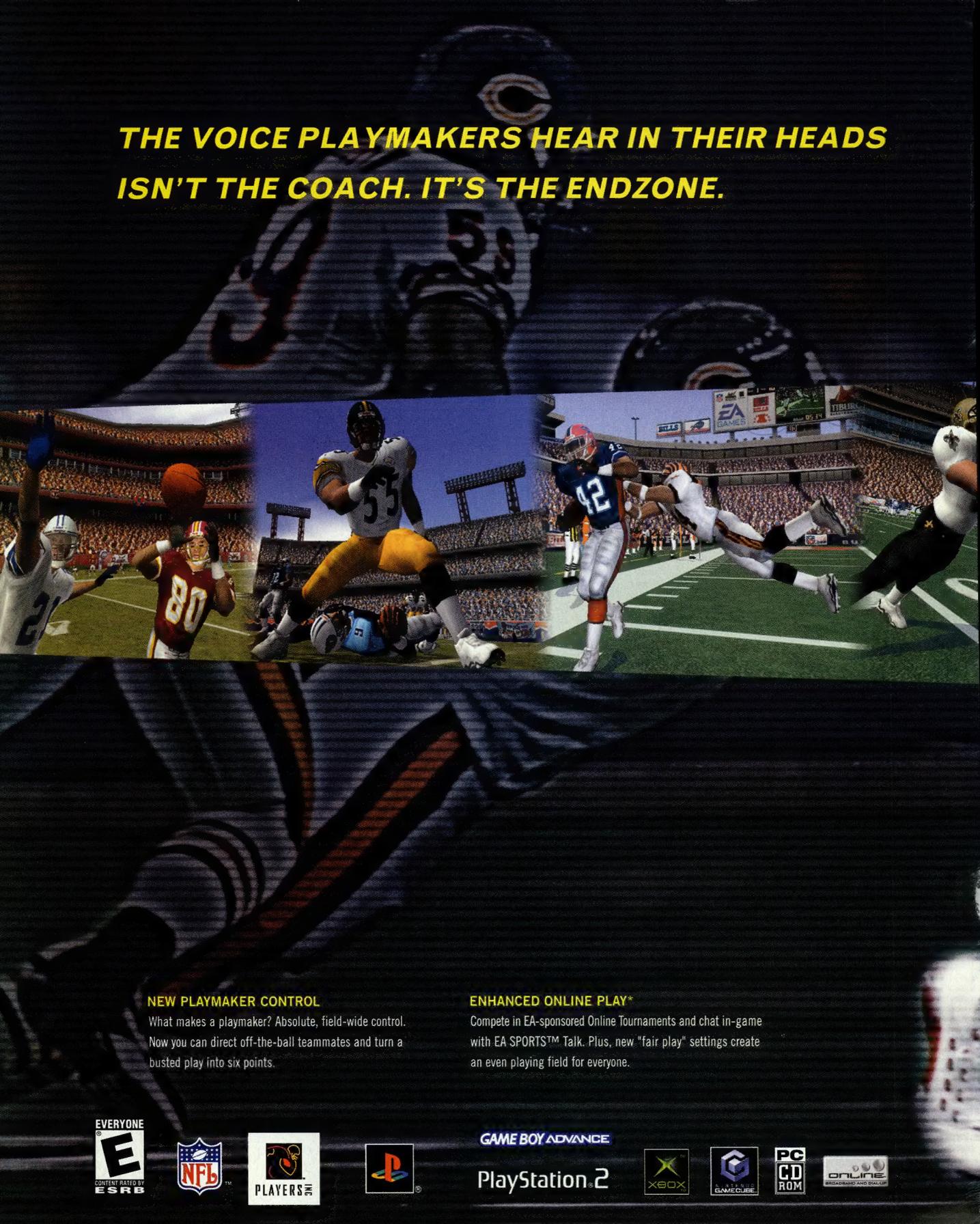
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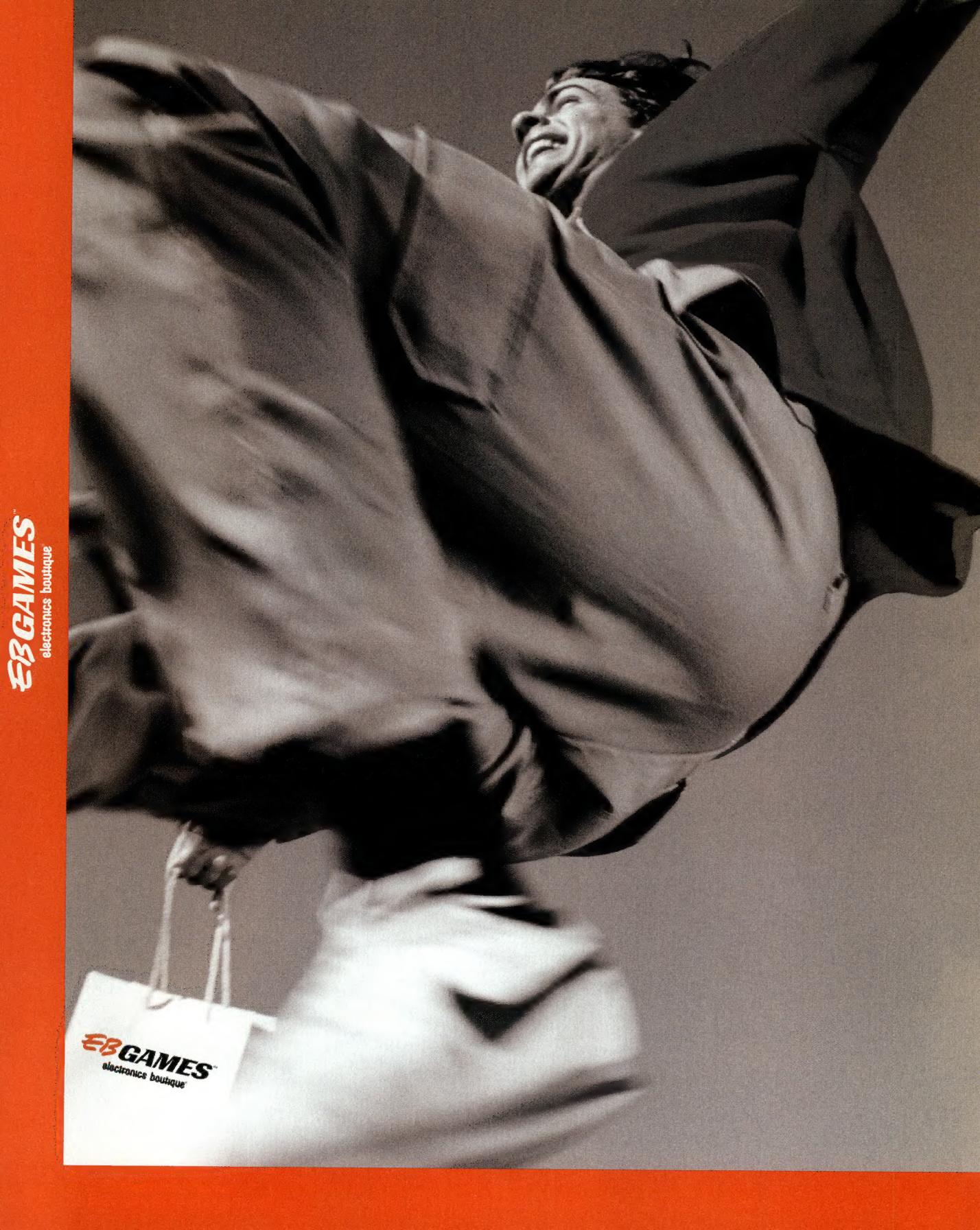
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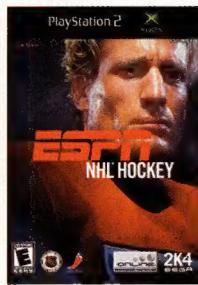
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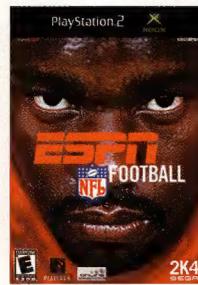
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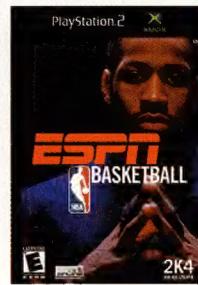
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GET MORE FROM YOUR GAMES

GMR



SEGA AND NINTENDO UP A TREE, KAY-EYE-ESS-ESS-EYE-EN-GEE! (US, CHILDISH? NAH...)

Prompted by our first Nintendo cover game, we thought now might be a good time to take stock of the Gamecube company's progress in the current console wars. No, wait—come back! It's more interesting than it sounds! Really!

You see, it doesn't seem so long ago that Nintendo was sitting right where Sony is now—on top. Granted, on top of a giant edible mushroom in a kingdom full of conscripted turtles, but on top, nonetheless. Contrast that to the present reality: Gamecube is a distant third in the domestic US market (now the largest videogame market in the world) and struggling to keep up, despite displaying its trademark first-party quality with games like *Metroid Prime*, *Mario Sunshine* (okay, slightly wobbly), *Super Smash Bros.*, *Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, and, now, the excellent *F-Zero GX*.

So what in Yoshi's name happened?

In preparation for our Nintendo feature on page 52 of this issue, we had a long conversation with Perrin Kaplan—NOA's tough-minded VP of marketing—about the problems facing

the one-time world videogame champs and what to do to make things right. We also present our own recipe for keeping Mario off unemployment... Elsewhere in the issue (and contrasting perfectly with Nintendo's image), Rockstar Games gives us a peek at *Manhunt*. It's about as subtle as a scud in the groin.

Simon Cox
Editor in Chief

ESPEECEEP GERRY SERRANO ART DIRECTOR

Better Than: a bag of pumpkin seeds
Worse Than: Grabbed by the Gerrals
Wait For It: *Gerio-Ware, Inc.*

Sole surviving member of the Merry Mariners, Gerry's an errant enigma brimming with roe. 9 issues later, we still can't understand a thing he says. Well, unless the word "Brwagh!!?" counts.



BIRTHDAY SURPRISE! JAMES MIELKE EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Better Than: You
Goes Great With: Chocolate cake
Wait for It: his patented E-Gasm™

This month, Milky took some time out from screaming at the TV to well, actually, that's about all he does. It'll cost more than a penny for this man's thoughts... he's rich.



WEDDED BLISSPI! DAVID CHEN MANAGING EDITOR

Better Than: half the world

Worse Than: his better half

Still Can't Find: his keys

Why are David's nerves so jangled this month? Earthquake retrofitting? Those *Farscape* revival rumors? Nope, he's about to be tied to the hitching post... on some island, somewhere. Will the lanky drifter return? !?



MR. HAPPY TOM PRICE NEWS EDITOR

Better Than: Klingons near Uranus

Worse Than: barbarians at the gate

Wait For It: His section

A proud new member of the Chunky Watch Kidz club, Tom goes to bed each night wishing desperately for the stylish Milky to acknowledge him in public, which won't happen until he starts sporting a pink furry cowboy hat.



BUTTON-MASHI! ANDREW PFISTER STAFF WRITER

Better Than: eval!

Nuthin' Worse Than: an ingrown nail

Wait For It: Sorry Skip...toes don't grow back For our top-secret Nintendo expose, we were forced to unshackle Andrew from his desk. He returned—ravaged and delirious—to report that not only does Mario do all of NOA's plumbing, he also cooks, weeds, and makes up the beds.



COMING...OR GOING? CAROLINE KING DESIGNER

Better than: a "real" job

Don't: speak to me right now. Thanks.

Can't wait for: ever

It didn't take too long for Caroline to adopt the urban lifestyle: she and her "roommate" have been upgrading apartments on a weekly basis. Now, which of you lads'll be the first to buy the nice young lady a lobster?



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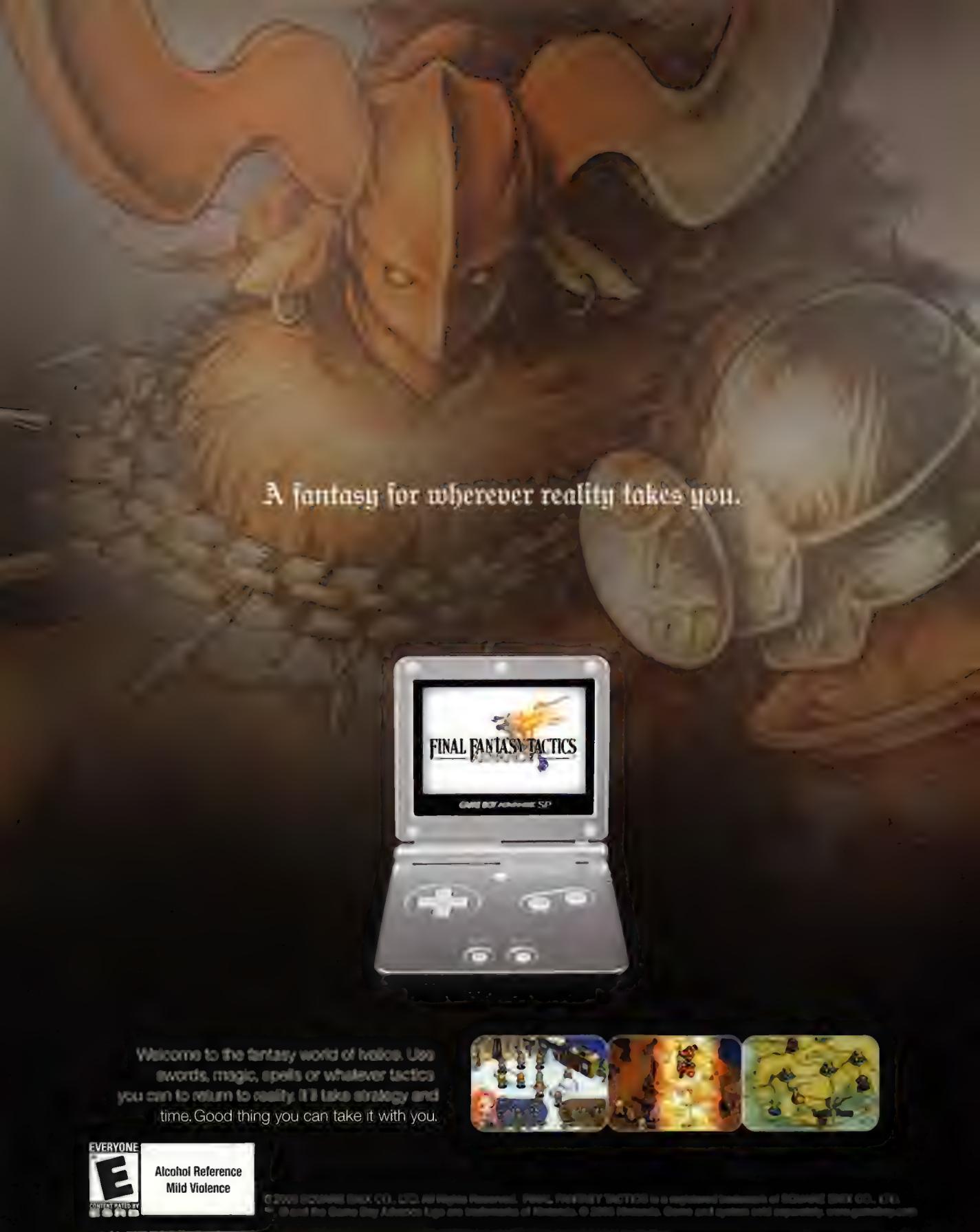
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EVERYONE



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POST

SEINFELD WAS PERHAPS THE GREATEST SHOW EVER. WHAT'S THAT GOT TO DO WITH GAMES? WELL, ERM...YOUR MOTHER!

BACK IT ON UP

I was reminiscing about that *Seinfeld* episode they did completely backward, and I started wondering if any games have ever used this plot mechanic. Who better to ask than the ever-knowledgeable *GMR* staff? Starting a game with the end credits and the climax, then playing backward to find out what brought the characters to that point could change the way games are played. I think it would be the mood-enhancing twist the slightly stagnant *Resident Evil* series needs.

Dustin Quillen

So, if any developers use this idea in a future game, somebody owes Dustin a nice, fat check! And we're surprised nobody has used the *Seinfeld/Memento* model yet; it's an interesting narrative style. To our knowledge, there hasn't been a backward game. Good question, Dustin.

SAVE THE "YOUR MOMMA" JOKES UNTIL THE END

Hi there, first things first: I am pleasantly surprised at the quality of your magazine. The writing is clever and inspired, and the coverage is up-to-date and relevant. Now that my lips smell like your ass, on to the question.

My mom gave up on trying to get me to quit playing videogames. Instead, she went by the age-old motto "If you can't beat them, join them." She asked me to show her how to play *Halo*, but I knew that would be too tough for such a novice. So, I bought a GameCube, not only so I could rock out some Game Boy Player (*Metroid Fusion* is my god), but

also so my mom could enter the wide world of videogames. I got *Zelda* and she was eager to start. After a few minutes of me trying to explain things to her, it became apparent to me how complex videogames have become. I had a five-minute conversation with her about saving, another lecture about targeting, and a seminar on camera control. I thought for sure she would give up, considering how difficult everything was for her, but she kept pushing along. She was quite upset when she realized she had to leave the opening island.

Zelda, while my mom loves it, will be too hard for her in a few more hours of play, though. I was wondering if you could recommend some good mom games. I have all three major consoles, so anything you guys can dole out would be great.

And to all the readers: Try to get your parents into gaming; it's brought me and my mom closer, and it's taken her mind off the stressful things in life, which equates to happier parents, and therefore, happier gamers.

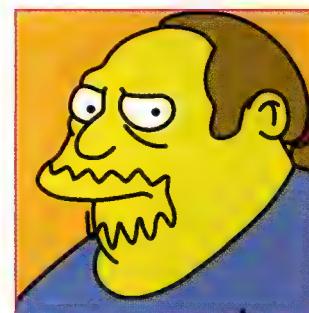
Thanks,
Brian, NC

We've always found that puzzle games are quite popular with people who don't normally play games. We know a few moms in particular who can take us apart in *Super Puzzle Fighter II*. You make an interesting and timely point: Nintendo President Satoru Iwata recently said Nintendo wants to focus on games that are simple to get into (*Super Monkey Ball* and *Kirby's Air Ride*, for example), but eventually reveal a lot of depth. So, you're not alone in thinking games are getting too complicated for their own good.

NOT HELPING YOUR CAUSE

I've had a subscription to your magazine for a few months now, and when I saw what you had to say about *Elite Force II* in issues 05 and 08, I was appalled. In "Endgame" (the last episode of *Star Trek Voyager*) and in *EF2*, *Voyager* is captured by a Borg sphere, not a cube! Apparently, all you at *GMR* failed shapes in first grade and don't know the difference between a circle and a square. If you ever encountered a Borg, he would say, "Your assimilation will regress us."

Joseph 3 of 12, Tertiary Adjutant 730890, Unimatrix 001, Queen's Chamber.



...nerd.

ALTERNATE REALITY

In page 49 of the kik A** issue there is a typo, the obvious PS2 is called teh Nintendo PSX, i was outraged in reading this, would u please apologize in teh following issue, ahh psyche i really dont care i jus wanted to point it out

XXMoBobXx@aol.com

Oh snap! You totally psyched us out! We got a bunch of letters pointing out that mistake. We can't really control the content of advertisements appearing in our magazine, but we're sure that the intelligent and incredibly attractive people at EB have taken steps to prevent any further typographical errors from occurring.

LEFT OUT IN THE COLD

I was just reading your first little news blurb about Bill Roper and the *Diablo* team and was thinking this would be a good time for commentary on the state of games. Vivendi, the company that owns Blizzard, is one of the largest media conglomerates in existence, owning hundreds of unrelated media companies in fields as different as radio, television, and game development. Can we really expect such a huge corporation to pay attention to mere talent? As videogames become a bigger and bigger business, we can expect less artist input and more push toward tried-and-true methods (look at the state of console gaming and its sequels for proof). In gaming's glory days (mid-'80s through the late '90s), the activity was an obscure geek pastime and games were made by charismatic geeks with oodles of talent. But as games move more and more toward mass entertainment, their creation will be ruled more and more by accountants who have never touched a game in their life (except maybe *Monopoly*).

I don't know a solution, except what worked when I was a kid: shareware and manageable (not 6GB) demos available for download. Look what it did for *Doom*. I really don't know if that is viable to

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today's market, though. I sincerely hope the Blizzard exiles find infinite success—I know I will be buying their games like mad. If they can make the perfection that is *Diablo*, they are capable of greatness.

_A.C.

Is the game industry getting too popular for its own good? We'd like to hear more opinions about this:
gmrfaziffdavis.com



PIKA SMASH

I just read your article about fighting games in your September issue (Punch-Drunk Love) and am disappointed you didn't mention what I believe to be one of the genre's best: *Super Smash Bros.* Although intended for play by children as well as adults (most N64 games are), it certainly matches such multiplayer Nintendo games as *Mario Kart*—perhaps even surpassing them.

Instead of having a standard combo setup to the fighting controls (as with pretty much every fighting game ever made), *Super Smash Bros.* decided to keep things simple, and I think it worked perfectly. Because of each character's varied attacks, not counting special abilities, the combinations are performed not from mashing some set order of buttons, but by watching your opponents' moves and then rolling, shielding, and kicking to damage them before they damage you.

Regarding *Soul Caliber II*, you mention that characters could guard back and forth like a block. In *Super Smash Bros.*, they can roll away, roll forward, activate a shield (or a reflective shield in Fox's case), grab them, or simply take the hit, which allows for effective defensive combos.

The character diversity is unparalleled, and the setup makes for easy learning but takes a lot of practice to master. And honestly, who doesn't like seeing Kirby slam Pikachu headfirst into the ground from 50 feet in the air and then watch as Pikachu flies into the distance crying out "Piiikaaaaaaa...." And to top it off, you can have Kirby wave his arms happily and say "Bye."

Awesome magazine, by the way—much better than others that I've paid over twice as much to subscribe to.

_Nathan

We think *Super Smash Bros. Melee* is one of the finest games you can own for GameCube and one of the best multiplayer games around. Perhaps we should have included it in Punch-Drunk Love, but we don't view it as a traditional fighting game. Much like *Powerstone*, we find *SSBM* to be more of a hybrid that goes beyond the typical definition of the genre.

E-EHI

Hi!

Just one question. Why is there not a CFL game made for us CFL fans to play and enjoy? Out of the hundreds of games you produce, what is wrong with making a CFL game?

I've been told that there isn't a market out there for it...but to be honest with you, some games out there are not the greatest ones on the shelf. So, what is the harm in creating a CFL game?

Respectfully,

_Frustrated Gamer

You hear that, EA? Gamer's getting frustrated!



MESSAGE BOARD JUNKIES

Gather around the campfire, kids. Inspired by this month's Nintendo feature, we're going to share stories about our favorite Nintendo games. Hey, XenoBach, you're sitting too close to the fire. Move back a little, please. MOVE, NOW. You want to sit in the car while the rest of us have fun? Because that's where you're headed!



would have to say *Yoshi's Island*. It had great levels, beautiful backgrounds, and is one of the deepest games I ever played.

_Namevar

Easily *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, which is arguably the best game ever made. A masterpiece in my eyes. It's just that it is an amazing experience that unfortunately is getting lost in the history of videogames because of people who value only graphics. I wish that everyone could experience this phenomenal adventure for themselves; it truly changed the way I look at videogames forever.

_XenoBach

guess I'd have to say that my favorite Nintendo-made game would be *Paper Mario*.

It was the first time I'd ever given a turn-based RPG a chance (by accident). I had so much fun playing that game, and because of it, I've discovered that I like an entire game genre that I had ignored until that point.

_irishmatt

Super Mario Bros. 3. There are so many things that make this game great. I could go on and on about the overworld maps, the numerous secret paths in levels, the über-items like the whistle or P-wing, but the defining moment in this game that will never leave my memory for as long as I live has to be my first use of the Hammer Bros. suit. Sorry, Tanooki suit.

_NowhereMan

I've gotta say *Metroid Fusion*. That game owned me like a fat kid owns cake.

_kerrcats

Super Metroid is my selection. This game is still the zenith of 2D side-scrolling games. It has not been surpassed, only borrowed from and imitated. No other title so perfectly blends action, adventure, and platforming, while testing one's skills with precise control. I can't think of a game before it that so well rewards a player's curiosity, except for *Metroid*. Every *Metroid* game I play feels like a silent film. The end sequence of *Super Metroid*

is as poignant and powerful as any scripted voice empowered, novel-length videogame story line. And its drama happens without a single word, and yet, when that Metroid came flying in, everyone I know that saw that scene leaped for joy and cheered like they just saw Franco's Immaculate Reception. Then with equal emotion, they cried out in vengeance when Mother Brain killed Aran's savior. I know it's the best game I've ever played. Quite possibly the best game ever made.

_VanDeBoer

Before last fall, I would have said *Zelda II*. Then I discovered *Animal Crossing* with its endless replay and addictive nature; I don't remember ever spending that much time with a game.

_Tifa

The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past for Super Nintendo. I spent so much time getting everything in the game (though I did die a few times) during my first time through. After that, I started a new game and got everything and beat it without dying at all. It's such a blast to play after all these years.

_Metermania

After much deliberation, I've decided that my favorite Nintendo game is *Pokemon Red/Pokemon Red* (along with my *Sega Genesis* games) is what really introduced me to the world of videogaming, and it was the first time that I really spent a whole lot of time with a single game.

_kajika

Ice Climbers, it's just so much fun even today, and I really dig the updated one on *Super Smash Bros. Melee*... they should bring that game to the Cube but make it simple and not add all the dressing they usually do on remakes. Just make it simple with four players and tons and tons of levels.

_foulwing

QUOTE OF THE MONTH:

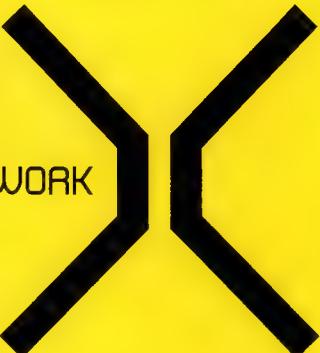
"I declare this day: S'mores! I neckfurters"

FRONT

DVD
PS1
GBA
PC
GAMECUBE
XBOX
PS2



GMR NEWS NETWORK



IN THE NEWS

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PSPower!

SONY'S HANDHELD WON'T DO WINDOWS, BUT OTHERWISE...

JAPAN

→ The big numbers may be that and nothing more, but Sony's announcement of detailed specs on its PSP handheld included details even ordinary gamers can get excited about. If you'd like a widescreen handheld with movie playback, wireless networking, and 3D power, it looks like PSP will fit your bill.

The system's heart will contain two 32-bit MIPS R4000 chips—a vector-unit-assisted CPU and an ancillary Media Engine—plus two graphics processors for geometry and rendering. The CPU will crank out 2.6 gigalops, and Sony claims the GPUs will produce 33 million polygons per second—that's half PS2's quoted figure. PSP will also have hardware features for curved-surface rendering, and there will be 12MB of eDRAM spread around the various chips: eight for the CPU, two for the Media Engine, and two megs of VRAM.

For movie playback, PSP will support the H.264 video codec, which Sony claims will fit a two-hour DVD-quality movie onto one 1.8GB Universal Media Disc (UMD). The sound chip will support up to 7.1 channels of surround sound, so movies shouldn't suffer in the audio department.

PSP also signals the death of the link cable. It will support the 802.11 wireless LAN standard, so you can wirelessly link PSPs in the same room. Its main interface is set to be very traditional, though—an analog stick, four face buttons, and two shoulder buttons.

Sony is up to something big with the UMD optical-disc format. It's building in copyright control, content ratings, and a region lockout, which strongly suggests it will store more than just games. Ken Kutaragi did call PSP the Walkman of the future, after all. We'll learn more at E3 2004 when Sony unveils the finished hardware. PSP games will follow at the Tokyo Game Show in September, and the system will launch worldwide by next Christmas. 

D.F.Smith



NOT AN ACTUAL PHOTO. CALM DOWN, FANGBOYS.

XSN-TIAL GAMING

MICROSOFT'S XSN SPORTS NETWORK IS FOR PLAYERS

U.S.A.

While it's easy to chalk up Microsoft's hyping of its new sports gaming brand, XSN Sports and its attendant web site XSNSports.com, as "desperate measures for desperate times," that amount of hyperbole may be unnecessary. While Xbox sales haven't lived up to everyone's—save Sony's—expectations, it seems that Microsoft is less desperate than it's willing to try new avenues to get gamers into its games. Which, ultimately, is a good thing.

Essentially, XSN Sports is Microsoft's sports brand in the same vein as Electronic Arts' EA Sports. Currently, there are six titles under the XSN umbrella: *NFL Fever 2004*, *Amped 2*, *Top Spin*, *Links 2004*, *Inside Drive 2004*, and *NHL Rivals 2004*, all of which were designed for Xbox Live.

In addition to touting the brand, Microsoft has also announced enhancements to XSNSports.com that serve to broaden the appeal of the company's games. Key to this move is the August 25 launch of Live

Web, a feature (free to Xbox Live users) that hopes to bridge the gap between Xbox Live players and PC players. Using Live Web, players will be able to sign on with their Xbox Live Gamertag and "stay connected" with other players, as well as view stats and scoreboards. Gamers will also be able to view their rankings in individual games, and with games like *NFL Fever 2004*, Live users will be able to do things like create tournaments and leagues that allow them to compete against their buddies, wherever those buddies may be. With *Amped 2*, gamers can form snowboarding packs and organize "free rides" with friends.

With these changes to XSNSports.com and the addition of Live Web, Microsoft is hoping that XSNSports.com will become the first Web stop for gamers and sports enthusiasts in general—the theory being that these two groups may in fact be made up of the same people. —Wil O'Neal



More info at www.xsnsports.com

GAMEPORT VITAL GAME INFO, NOW BOARDING...

Arrivals COMING SOON

SYSTEM	ETA	TITLE	HOW HOT?
XB	SEP	HALF-LIFE 2	████████
ALL	SEP	XIII	████████
ALL	SEP	ROGUE OPS	████████
PC	SEP	HOMEWORLD 2	████████
ALL	SEP	NHL 2004	████████
GC	OCT	ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE	████████
GBA	OCT	SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4	████████
GC	OCT	VIEWTIFUL JOE	████████
GC	OCT	PIKMIN 2	████████
XB	OCT	DINO CRISIS 3	████████
ALL	OCT	TONY HAWK'S UNDER GROUND	████████
XB/PC	NOV	ARMED & DANGEROUS	████████
GC	NOV	MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!	████████
PS2	NOV	CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE	████████
PS2	NOV	RATCHET & CLANK 2: GOING COMMANDO	████████
XB	NOV	NINJA GAIDEN	████████

DEPARTURES OUT NOW

SYSTEM	TITLE	GMR SCORE
GC	F-ZERO GX	9/10
ALL	SOUL CALIBUR II	9/10
PS2	VIRTUA FIGHTER 4: EVOLUTION	10/10
XB	STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC	10/10
PC	GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY	10/10
PC	PLANETSIDE	5/10
XB/GC	SX SUPERSTAR	5/10
XB	RENT-A-HERO NO. 1	4/10
PS2	SILENT HILL 3	8/10
PC	STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE II	8/10
PS2	INDIANA JONES & THE EMPEROR'S TOMB	7/10
PS2	SUMMER BEACH VOLLEYBALL	4/10
PC	WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE	9/10
XB	OUTLAW VOLLEYBALL	8/10
PS2/XB/GC/PC	MADDEN 2004	9/10
PS2/XB	ESPN NFL FOOTBALL	8/10

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INFOMANIA!
THE LATEST ON...

KILLZONE

The subject of much rumor and speculation, Sony Europe's highly hyped *Killzone* has finally seen the light of day. Set in the war-torn near future, this ultra-stylish FPS finds a four-man squad of soldiers battling behind enemy lines against a faction known as the Helghast.

Developer Guerrilla Games eschews the more complex team-management aspects seen in recent FPSes such as *SOCOM*, concentrating more on enemy and teammate A.I. Still, at each level, players choose their four squad members, each with their own gear and abilities.

While *Killzone* hasn't yet been announced for North America, any game touted as a "Halo killer" seems like a sure bet Stateside. An all-new game engine, full online support, and a professional cast of voice actors (as yet unannounced) should ensure royal treatment of *Killzone* upon its March 2004 European release. ■

[TALENT]

★ TIM KITZROW

THE VOICE OF MIDWAY SPORTS GOES BOOM SHAKA LAKA!

→ Here at GMR, we prefer sports announcers with the illmatic flow to those we already know. Which brings us neatly to Tim Kitzrow. While he might not sign as many autographs as John Madden at 7-Eleven, you definitely know his work. He's been the voice of *NBA Showtime*, *NFL Blitz*, *MLB Slugfest*, and *NHL Hitz*. With that, we set a trap for Mr. Kitzrow, filled with Miller Lite and Tabasco Slim Jims—and it wasn't long before we had him seated comfortably in a Craftmatic reclining chair, singing like a canary.

GMR: Who was the better rapper, Biggie or Tupac?

Tim: They were both just ripping off Vanilla Ice. I do a little rap myself.

GMR: That's awesome! You've been the voice—nay, the soul—of Midway's sports games for years now. For which game do you most enjoy doing voice-overs?

Tim: Thanks for the compliment. You may have just helped me get a raise. Although *NHL Hitz Pro* was a blast with ESPN radio personality Harry Tienowitcz, I'd have to say *Slugfest* with Kevin Matthews (Jimmy Shorts) has been my favorite game to date.

GMR: You're our hero. For real. How do you feel about that?

Tim: If you look like the babe who had the hots for Spider-Man, I'd say send me your picture. But if it's the kind of hero worship Robin has for Batman and you look up to a man in tights...you need to talk to your clergyman. On second thought, that may not be a good idea.

GMR: Ooo-K. In the sound booth, is it difficult to summon up something that's supposed to sound live and on-

the-fly in the context of a real game?

Tim: It just takes a good imagination (and a little Red Bull). You have to see everything clearly in your mind before you deliver a line. Some guys in the business just read the script and cash their checks. I'm one step away from the guy down at the bus station who sees lots of things that aren't there.

GMR: Do you work from a script or is it all just some general guideline stuff?

Tim: I've always improvised a lot, but basically, everything is scripted. I wrote the script for *MLB Slugfest*, but Kevin and I improvised all of the load screens and much of the back-and-forth in-game banter. He's the funniest guy I've ever met. You should hear the stuff that was censored.

GMR: What happens when we die?

Tim: We sit with God in front of his big-screen TV while he laughs his head off watching his favorite show, *Life's Funniest Home Videos*, starring you.

GMR: Do you know a lot about all the sports that you do the voice work for? Or are you totally winging it on some?

Tim: I know everything...me and Jim Rome. ■

EXTRA FORCE
GOODIES FOR SW GAMERS
U.S.A.

→ Star Wars fans who preorder *Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike* are in for a surprise so happy, it would make C-3PO leak oil from his protocol port. LucasArts will include an extra disc packed full of goodies for those that sign up early. On the disc: a playable demo of *Rebel Strike*'s

High level (have fun Tauntaun-busting and lightsabering open those AT-AT bellies), trailers for *Rebel Strike* and turn-based gladiator battler *Gladius*, and the coup de grace, a port of the original vector-based *Star Wars* arcade game. Use the Force, yo. ■



CLICKS

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[BLIPS]

Throttle Down

Full Throttle: Hell on Wheels, LucasArts' follow-up to its classic adventure game, has been cancelled. The cartoonish game about biker gangs prowling the Southwest was less than impressive at this year's E3.

Aye, Admiral

→ Add another handheld to your list of junk. The un sanctioned Game Theory Admiral looks like a GBA but plays old Famicom cartridges. Unfortunately it does not play U.S. cartridges, so don't get excited.

Call Him Snake

Tough-as-nails Snake Plissken, the anti-hero played by Kurt Russell in *Escape From New York* and *Escape From L.A.* is getting his own gaming franchise. Namco Hometek will release the first title in late 2005.

MARIO PARTY

THE STARS CAME OUT

U.S.A.

The sophisticated AIAS Awards are the Oscars of the games industry. By contrast, G4 Media's recent G-Phoria Glow Awards show is a strictly for-television event, complete with cue cards, open bar, and flashing disco lights. Industry hacks, PR flacks, Tony Hawk, Public Enemy, and the odd porn star rubbed elbows at the Henry Fonda Theatre in L.A. on July 30 for a night of videogames, booze, and, er, more booze.

Additional star power was provided by Mr. Frodo himself, Elijah Wood (big games fan), and "that bloke who played the other one, Merry," whose name turns out to be Dom, as well as Barenaked Ladies band member Ed Robertson, who had fun with Konami's *Karaoke Revolution*. So busy was GMR with sampling each of the three bars in the theatre that we missed the actual awards themselves, though we do remember that *Vice City* cleaned up. Rockstar's rockstar of a game won

everything from the EB Gamers Choice Awards (presented by the unreasonably tall Tony Hawk) to Game of the Year, as well as multiple awards for sound, including Best Live Action/Voice Performance for...porn star Jenna Jameson. Other winners allegedly included *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* for Best Adaptation, DOAX's Tina for Hottest Character, and *Animal Crossing* for Most Innovative Game.

GMR would like to take this opportunity to add a few awards of its own. Best Drink goes to Red Bull and vodka; Best Drunk goes to GMR's own David Chen; and Best Undressed goes to the Tecmo *Dead or Alive* girls, who very nearly wore clothing—but not quite. Best Celebrity That Didn't Look Bored/Aloof and/or Coerced by Agent Into Attending goes to Ed Robertson—a GMR subscriber, no less. Even the stars read GMR. You know, for the horoscopes. ■

[More Info at www.g4tv.com](http://www.g4tv.com)



CAPCOMICS!

DANTE. MEGAMAN GET THE 4-COLOR TREATMENT

CANADA

Haven't heard of Dreamwave Productions? You soon will. In 2002, it rocketed to the top of the comic-book charts with its stunning take on the beloved *Transformers* (expect the company to be heavily involved in Atari's forthcoming game). Dreamwave followed this up with its illustrated version of another '80s icon, the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Boasting an international stable of top-notch writers and artists, it's no surprise that the Toronto-based company was awarded the license to some of Capcom's most cherished franchises. *Mega Man's* comic-

book debut should be hitting store shelves right about now (just in time for his 15th anniversary!), and there are illustrated versions of *Maximo*, *Rival Schools*, and *Darkstalkers* on the horizon.

But the biggest news is that the company will create a *Devil May Cry* comic book, due out at the beginning of 2004. Spearheaded by Dreamwave founder, president, and self-described "DMC freak" Pat Lee, the fully painted four-issue miniseries will loosely follow series star Dante's adventures on Mallet Island as he struggles to come to grips with his demonic lineage. ■



[BLIPS]

Tap This

Tapwave, founded by ex Palm employees, has named its new handheld gaming device. *Zodiac* will feature an ATI graphics processor for 3D gaming, built in Bluetooth, and a 640x320 color screen.

Late Ops

Joint Operations, the near-future-set combat shooter from NovaLogic (makers of *Black Hawk Down*), has been pushed back to early 2004. The multiplayer action will support up to 64 players on the PC.

Nintendo Sales

Nintendo's financial results for Q1 are in. The company sold 3.24 million GBAs, 85 percent of which (2.75 million, if you don't have a calculator) were the new SPs. That's a lot of little squares of light in the dark.

PLAYSTATION KNOWLEDGE

THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!



JOHN DAVISON

EYE TOY BELIEVER

→ I'll be the first to admit that when the boffins at Sony first told us about the idea for Eye Toy, I thought it was a dumb idea. Who would want to wave their arms in front of the television just to play some crappy little minigame? But how wrong and shortsighted I was.

Five years from now, Eye Toy may well be looked back on as the gateway drug of gaming. The doobie of interactive entertainment. If you knew nothing about videogames and you went to a party that had this thing on a television in the living room, you'd be transfixed. I guarantee it. Sure, games like *Wishy-Washy* sound dumb to hardcore gamers, but to someone who thinks that holding a joypad is ridiculous, being able to interact with something onscreen like this is just incredible. Everyone who plays with Eye Toy does so with a crap-eating grin on their face the entire time.

Beyond this, it also opens up all kinds of user-interface possibilities. Games can "watch" you do things and respond only when you make the right gestures, and they can even snap pictures of you and map your face onto in-game characters.

When it hits stores later this month, don't dismiss it. Eye Toy could be the start of something huge. ■

John Davison is Editor-in-Chief of the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine.

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

GMR CHARTS

THE TOP-SELLING GAMES FOR EVERY SYSTEM FOR JULY 03

TOP 10 ALL FORMATS

RANK	TITLE	FORMAT	SCORE
01	NCAA FOOTBALL 2004 <small>How many students lied to their parents and said they needed the \$49.99 for books?</small>	PS2	9
02	STAR WARS: K.O.T.O.R. <small>Hotter than a lightsaber shined where the Force don't shine.</small>	PC	10
03	WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE <small>Staying frozen at No. 3. That line just wrote itself.</small>	PC	9
04	NCAA FOOTBALL 2004 <small>Dang, the kids really like the college ball, don't they?</small>	XB	9
05	DRAGON BALL Z: LEGACY II <small>We still hate that pointy-haired dude.</small>	GBA	7
06	STAR WARS GALAXIES <small>After a shaky start, it's finding its legs. It's no KOTOR, though.</small>	PC	7
07	ADVANCE WARS 2 <small>War may be hell, but it's cute. Cute as hell?</small>	GBA	8
08	PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN <small>It has very little to do with the movie. Is that good or bad?</small>	XB	6
09	DONKEY KONG COUNTRY <small>In real life, Donkey Kong would peel you like a banana.</small>	GBA	6
10	TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS <small>The only thing sagging is this game's sales.</small>	PS2	4

PC TOP 10

		SCORE
01	WC3: THE FROZEN THRONE	9
02	STAR WARS GALAXIES	7
03	NWN: SHADOWS OF UNDERTIDE	9
04	FLIGHT SIM 2004	TBD
05	THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR	6
06	GTA: VICE CITY	10
07	RISE OF NATIONS	8
08	PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN	6
09	BATTLEFIELD 1942	8
10	NEVERWINTER NIGHTS	8

GBA TOP 10

		SCORE
01	DRAGON BALL: LEGACY II	7
02	DONKEY KONG COUNTRY	6
03	ADVANCE WARS 2	8
04	MEGA MAN 3 BLUE	8
05	WARIO WARE	9
06	KIRBY	7
07	SPY KIDS 2	TBD
08	YU-GI-OH! WORLD	6
09	MEGA MAN 3 WHITE	8
10	LEGEND OF ZELDA	9

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PHIL THEODORE

FAB FAM

On July 15, Nintendo's Famicom celebrated its 20th anniversary. For those who don't know, the Famicom was the Japanese version of the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES).

As gamers, we all owe a debt to the Famicom for rejuvenating our hobby. Even the most die-hard Nintendo hater must admit that the Famicom was the starting point of modern gaming.

At the time, the videogames market had crashed hard. Companies were losing money and abandoning the business. During this dark time, Nintendo saw an opportunity and took it. It released the Famicom with its killer app, *Super Mario Bros.*, which (at the time) showcased an astounding leap in graphics, sound, and (most important) game design.

Nintendo started making tons o' money. Soon, Sega decided to get in on the game. Then Sony. Then Microsoft. Voilà! Thanks to the Famicom, a once-dead industry had been reborn.

Now, I'm certainly not saying that without the Famicom, we wouldn't have Xbox today. We'd need a time machine to test that theory. I'm just saying that I'm glad the ol' Famicom came along when it did. Even if we did have to blow into the carts to get them to play sometimes. 

PS2 TOP 10

		SCORE
01	NCAA FOOTBALL 2004	9
02	NBA STREET VOL. 2	9
03	BIG MUTHA TRUCKERS	4
04	TOMB RAIDER	4
05	MIDNIGHT CLUB II	8
06	.HACK MUTATION	8
07	JAMES BOND 007: NIGHTFIRE	7
08	ARC THE LAD	5
09	GTA: VICE CITY	10
10	SILENT LINE: ARMORED CORE	7

XBOX TOP 10

		SCORE
01	NCAA FOOTBALL 2004	9
02	HALO	10
03	OUTLAW VOLLEYBALL	8
04	PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN	6
05	BIG MUTHA TRUCKERS	4
06	MIDNIGHT CLUB II	8
07	SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II	6
08	MORROWIND	8
09	RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN	8
10	FUZION FRENZY	TBD

GC TOP 10

		SCORE
01	MARIO GOLF	9
02	LOZ: THE WIND WAKER	9
03	WAVE RACE	8
04	WARIO WORLD	7
05	SONIC ADVENTURE DX	7
06	SUPER SMASH BROS.	9
07	NCAA FOOTBALL 2004	9
08	MARIO PARTY 4	8
09	BLOOD RAYNE	TBD
10	MEGA MAN	6

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PlayStation®2



SPELLBOUND

GOT A BLACK-MAGIC SIM-WOMAN

U.S.A.

The latest in the long line of highly successful expansions for Maxis' PC gaming juggernaut franchise, *The Sims*, has been summoned. *The Sims Makin' Magic* will give fans of the game the power to enable their Sims with magical powers, both evil and benign, as well as explore a new environment away from home: Magic Town. Let's see that Bella Goth spurn our advances once we mix up a special love potion.

As anyone who has played *The Sims* will confirm, most of your time is spent doing menial household tasks and taking care of other boring business (hmm, sounds like actual life...hey!). But in *Makin' Magic*, you can add to your family spell book a few potions and spells, which will do things like take out the trash or do the dishes for you. Heck, you can even hire a zombie maid. But be careful, every spell has the potential to



backfire on you.

Magic Town, the new "neighborhood" you can visit by going through the Magic Portal, is a totally new carnival-themed environment full of rides and diversions. There, you can meet other magicians and compete with them in spellcasting showdowns to accrue ingredients for your potions and spells. You will also meet new characters, like the Snake Charmer and the Faerie Queen, whom you can trade and

perform tricks with.

As in all *Sims* expansions, you'll be given a host of new items to play with, including magic beehives, charm makers, and new materials to decorate your house with. Creaking stairs and moving pictures are the perfect complement to your spook house. *The Sims Makin' Magic* will appear on shelves in October. ■

[More info at thesims.ea.com](http://thesims.ea.com)

PC KNOWLEDGE

THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!



JEFF GREEN

GLOW BUDDY

→ Hello? Where am I? On what planet have I awoken? Because surely I cannot be on Earth anymore. On Earth, a game like *Tron 2.0* would just have to suck. Wouldn't it? A first-person shooter based on a 20-year-old Disney movie, which wasn't that great at the time and is even worse in retrospect? A movie starring Bruce Boxleitner?

But no. *Tron 2.0*, despite an incredibly uncool pedigree, turns out to be, quite surprisingly, just about the coolest shooter I've played in years, one that I'd compare favorably, in terms of both aesthetics and gameplay, with the classic *System Shock 2*.

It shouldn't come as a surprise. *Tron 2.0* was developed, after all, by Seattle-based Monolith Studios, whose previous three games—*No One Lives Forever 1* and *Aliens vs. Predator 2*—established them as one of the most creative developers around.

Now challenged to create a game from a pretty goofy license, Monolith has delivered in spades. The levels are wonders of creative art design. And like every Monolith game, it's funny too.

Monolith has been making great PC games for years, but it has yet to fully break out into that A-list status level of, say, Blizzard or BioWare. *Tron 2.0* may do the trick. It's well-deserved and about time. ■

Jeff Green is Editor-in-Chief of *Computer Gaming World* magazine.

CORE DUMP

LARA'S GOT SOME NEW HANDLERS

U.S.A.

→ The movie studios blamed the disappointing game for screwing up the weekend gross for *Tomb Raider: Cradle of Life*. Eidos, which publishes the game, blamed a weak script and a crap movie for screwing up its game sales. In GMR's humble opinion, they were both right. The enormous amount of suckage that surrounds the once-popular Ms. Croft has reached such black-hole proportions that the studio that created her, the U.K.-based Core Design, has been given the boot by Eidos and told to stay at least 500 yards away from Lara at all times. In addition, Core's managing director, the colorful Jeremy Smith, has

stepped down. GMR is guessing that his resignation came as a great surprise to him.

Development duties for the next and future *Tomb Raiders* have been handed to Crystal Dynamics, the respected U.S. shop behind the *Legacy of Kain* series. According to a recent corporate finance statement, the next *Tomb Raider* game will debut in June 2005. So what kind of game can we expect? Eidos isn't saying, but one of its spokedsdroids told us, "Eidos is currently closely reviewing the series to determine the next steps." Having played *The Angel of Darkness*, we think that's probably a good idea. We wish them luck. ■



[BLIPS]

Madden Hall of Fame

EA Sports' long-running *Madden NFL* series has been enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. Strangely, Madden himself hasn't had his large frame inducted yet.

BioWare + Obsidian

Hot off *KOTOR*, developer BioWare has joined forces with Obsidian Entertainment to collaborate on future PC and console titles. Obsidian is led by CEO Feargus Urquhart of Black Isle Studios fame.

Wario Where?

Fans of minigames: Get ready for an epileptic fit when Nintendo brings *Wario Ware* to GameCube later this fall. Scheduled for release in October in Japan, a U.S. release should follow shortly after.

A Game You Can't Refuse!

MAFIA



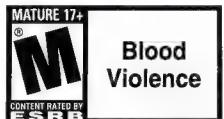
www.mafia-game.com



PlayStation®2



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Blood
Violence

BOYSTOYS

MADCATZ BRINGS US A SLEW OF NEW FUN STUFF

TECH

→ Mad Catz has brought us some new toys to play with to tide us over till the yuletide season.

LUMICON

\$24.99 (XBOX) \$19.99 (PS2)

→ familiar: You're playing *Halo* in the dark, buck naked, and your microwave dings. Jalapeño popper time! You come back to the living room, and you can't remember where you put the controller last and think, "Wouldn't it be nice if that thing lit up?" OK, maybe not, but if you do get caught in that situation, or if you're a raver, you might want to check out the Mad Catz LumiCON for Xbox and PS2. Building on its already successful controller chassis, the LumiCON comes in one of four glowing flavors for Xbox and three for PlayStation 2. In addition to the trippy effects, the LumiCON sports gold contacts for superior signal transfer. It brings light in. ←



RETROCON

\$24.99

→ Ergonomics be damned, many of us wouldn't mind going back to the days when controllers were shaped like bricks instead of Naboo Starfighters. Of course, the old D-pad and two-button setup wouldn't be adequate for the more complex games of today, which demand more of controllers. Enter the Mad Catz RetroCon, a gamepad designed to evoke the nostalgic designs of early videogame controllers but also give gamers the control and accessibility they need. The RetroCON—\$24.99 for PlayStation and PS2—may be retro, but it sports dual analog sticks, illuminated analog buttons, rumble capabilities, and a rubberized grip. Good for chucking across rooms. ←



7.0" UNIVERSAL LCD TRAVEL DISPLAY

\$199.99

→ Handhelds are the hot thing right now. From GBA SP and PSP to cell phones, everyone wants to take their games on the road nowadays. But some of us would rather play something a little more exciting than *Tetris*. Those with a strong back, who are willing to take their consoles on the road, can enjoy them with the 7.0" Universal Travel Display for Xbox, GameCube, and PlayStation 2. In addition to the backlit 7.0" high-res, TFT active-matrix display (with full color and a 16:9 aspect ratio), the unit comes with an integrated speaker system and two headphone jacks. The locking mechanism allows the unit to be easily attached to any of the three consoles, as well as surfaces like tabletops or desks. ←



[More Info at www.madcatz.com](http://www.madcatz.com)

[BLIPS]

Maxx Payne Sues

Former WCW wrestler Maxx Payne has sued Rockstar Games and Remedy Entertainment, among others, for using his name for the successful *Max Payne*. Yeah, dude, they were trading on your fame.

Unreal II to Xbox

Unreal II: The Awakening will be coming to Xbox this holiday season. The Xbox version will have exclusive multiplayer modes over Xbox Live, as well as a two-player splitscreen co-op mode.

Casting Call

Call of Duty, Activision's upcoming WWII epic, has enlisted the help of some Hollywood actors. Jason Statham (*The Italian Job*) and Giovanni Ribisi (*Saving Private Ryan*, *Friends*) will lend their voices to the game.

XBOX KNOWLEDGE

THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!



EVAN SHAMOON

EAST MEETS REST

→ With less than 500,000 Xboxes sold in Japan since launch, Microsoft is starting to take the situation very seriously. The recently appointed Peter Moore spoke of the company introducing various Xbox Live updates to the Japanese service while shortening the wait for new European and American titles with its new Xbox World Collection. Microsoft is also dropping the price of Xbox Live significantly, which is a good way to get the console online in more Japanese homes.

Most significantly, however, the company is bringing Xbox directly under Redmond's control instead of delegating its control to its local subsidiary headed by Hirohisa Ohura in Tokyo. Xbox's Ed Fries has been quoted as saying that Ohura's "experimental" nature played a part in this reorganization.

Japan holds many of the finest game designers in the world. Like PS2, Xbox has found much support from the American and European development communities. Unlike PS2, however, Xbox harbors merely a handful of Japanese titles—literally a fraction of those found on any other successful videogame console in the past 10 years. If Microsoft wishes to stand a chance against Sony on the world stage, this situation must be resolved. ←

Evan Shamoon is Editor-in-Chief of *Xbox Nation*.

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GAMEPLANNER | SEPTEMBER 2003

SORRY KIDS, IT'S BACK TO SCHOOL TIME. DON'T GET YOUR GBA TAKEN AWAY!

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

SATURDAY



06

FRIDAY



05

THURSDAY



04

WEDNESDAY



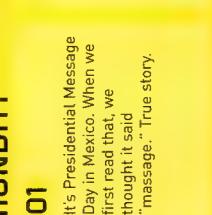
03

TUESDAY



02

MONDAY



01

It's Presidential Message Day in Mexico. When we first read that, we thought it said "message." True story.

The Xbox gets a version of *Dynasty Warriors 4*, while PC gamers get the *Secret Weapons of WWII* expansion for *Battlefield 1942*.

Two new GBA SP colors are now available: flamer red and onyx (that's fancy for "black"). Use the SP to play *Final Fantasy Tactics*. Or play *Wrestlemania XX* for GC. Whatever.

Out now: *Warhammer 40,000* for PS2 and PC; *Dino Crisis 3* for Xbox; *Jed Knight II* for PC; *Shin Megami Tensei: Shin & Devil Summoner*; *Hit & Run* and *Freedom Fighters*, for all three consoles.

In stores: *ESPN NHL Hockey* (PS2, Xbox); *Half-Life: Outbreak* (PS2); *Lethal Skies* (PS2); *StarSky & Hutch* (PC, Xbox); *The and Bakai* (GBA). The games are in your hands.

Big day: *Voodo Vince, Billy Hatcher, D&D Heroes, Gladiator, Group S Challenge, DDR Max 2, Tiger Woods 2004, Wallace & Gromit, and NHL Hitz Pro* are released.

Are you ready for some hockey? It's a Monday-night party when EA's *NHL 2004* laces up for PS2, GC, and Xbox. If only it could fight Sega's *ESPN NHL Hockey*.

The revamped *NFL Blitz* series turns *Pro* this year, as Midway adds full 11-on-11 play and real 10-yard first downs. As long as we're not flagged for late hits, we can deal.

It's the birthday of Confucius, as celebrated and observed by the people of Taiwan.

SUNDAY



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HOT MUSCLE PUMP

DON'T LIKE IKARUGA? TRY CHOU ANIKI INSTEAD. IT'S MANLY

JAPAN

→ Though many thought it dead with developer NCS/Masaya, it seems nothing can kill *Chou Aniki* (*Super Brother*), the PC and Sega Saturn 2D shooter series made infamous by its beefcake heroes and homoerotic imagery. Japanese publisher Global A (along with developer X-Nauts, which absorbed NCS) is bringing the franchise back with *Chou Aniki Seinaru Protein Densetsu* for PlayStation 2; this version will be another 2D shooter that purports to explain the origin of the series' muscle-man heroes, Samson and Adon.

If you've never seen *Chou Aniki*, it's hard to get your mind around it. Imagine a side-scrolling shooter. Now, replace the spaceships and aliens with mutant steroid addicts in thong underwear and you'll have the basic idea. The PS2 game seems less explicit than its Saturn forebear (as yet, fewer obviously phallic symbols seem to be in evidence), but there's still plenty of disturbing innuendo on tap.

If you're into that kind of thing, get the import hookup. *Protein Densetsu* is due out in Japan this October. In the meantime, the curious can observe the full history of the series at www.chouaniki.com. ■



→ The game's charge-up system provides an example of the new, subtler *Chou Aniki* style. You can fire limp, drooping shots to take out ground targets or power up with a fully erect forward-firing beam. We're not proud that we noticed the symbolism there, but...er....

SCHWAAAAAAAH!!!

PEPSIMAN—THE GREATEST COLA MASCOT EVER

JAPAN

→ Japan may have its share of issues as a nation—moribund economy, rampant karaoke abuse—but it does advertising as well as anyone. The best the Pepsi-Cola company can muster for its American promotions is Bob Dole's fading libido. Such pathetic antics pale before the computer-animated might of Japanese hero Pepsiman.

Pepsiman, designed by Industrial Light & Magic to be Japan's ultimate Pepsi pitchman, is a cultural phenomenon who transcends the bounds of his soft-drink origins. His shining faceless visage has found its way into myriad merchandising tie-ins

(particularly collectible bottle caps) and even the videogame world. Pepsiman is a hidden character in the Japanese version of *Fighting Vipers* for Saturn, and he also starred in his own PlayStation action-platformer. Collectors should note that the PSX game is the only place to track down the rare reggae version of the surf-guitar Pepsiman theme.

Pepsiman's appeal stems from not only his heroic powers, but also his vulnerability. He can summon waves of Pepsi with his "SCHWAAH!" action, but he never survives his missions of mercy unscathed, frequently taking dangerous spills in his pursuit of refreshment. Even so, he always bounces back in time for

the next commercial. Check them out at www.pepsi.co.jp. ■



INTERNATIONAL
REPORT

XB

PC

PS2

GBA

GC

WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

SEGA REJIGS ITS DEVELOPMENT STUDIOS...AGAIN

JAPAN

Sega's reorganization continues from the top down. Since Hitmaker's Hisao Oguchi took over Sega's presidency last month, the company has remixed its nine development subsidiaries, folding four teams into four others and starting up two new studios.

United Game Artist [Rez] is now part of Sonic Team, which has a new focus on casual gamers. Sega Rosso [Initial D] has been folded into Hitmaker [Crazy Taxi], and has emphasis on games for devices outside the console realm. Amusement Vision now includes staff from both Smilebit and Amusement Vision—those

responsible for mainstream games like *Super Monkey Ball* and *Jet Set Radio*. Meanwhile, Smilebit and AV's sports developers have combined under the Smilebit name. Finally, WOW and Overworks (*House of the Dead* and *Skies of Arcadia*, respectively) are now Wow Works—charged with creating games

that will appeal to all age groups.

AM2 is still AM2, retaining its focus on hardcore fighting fans. The biggest change, though, may be Yu Suzuki's re-emergence. He's formed his own studio, Cinematic Online Games, and may be returning to work on some of his past big-name franchises. 

A HANDY CHART TO TRY AND MAKE SENSE OF SEGA'S DEVELOPMENT TEAM REORGANIZATION, IF THAT'S EVEN POSSIBLE.



follow your imagination

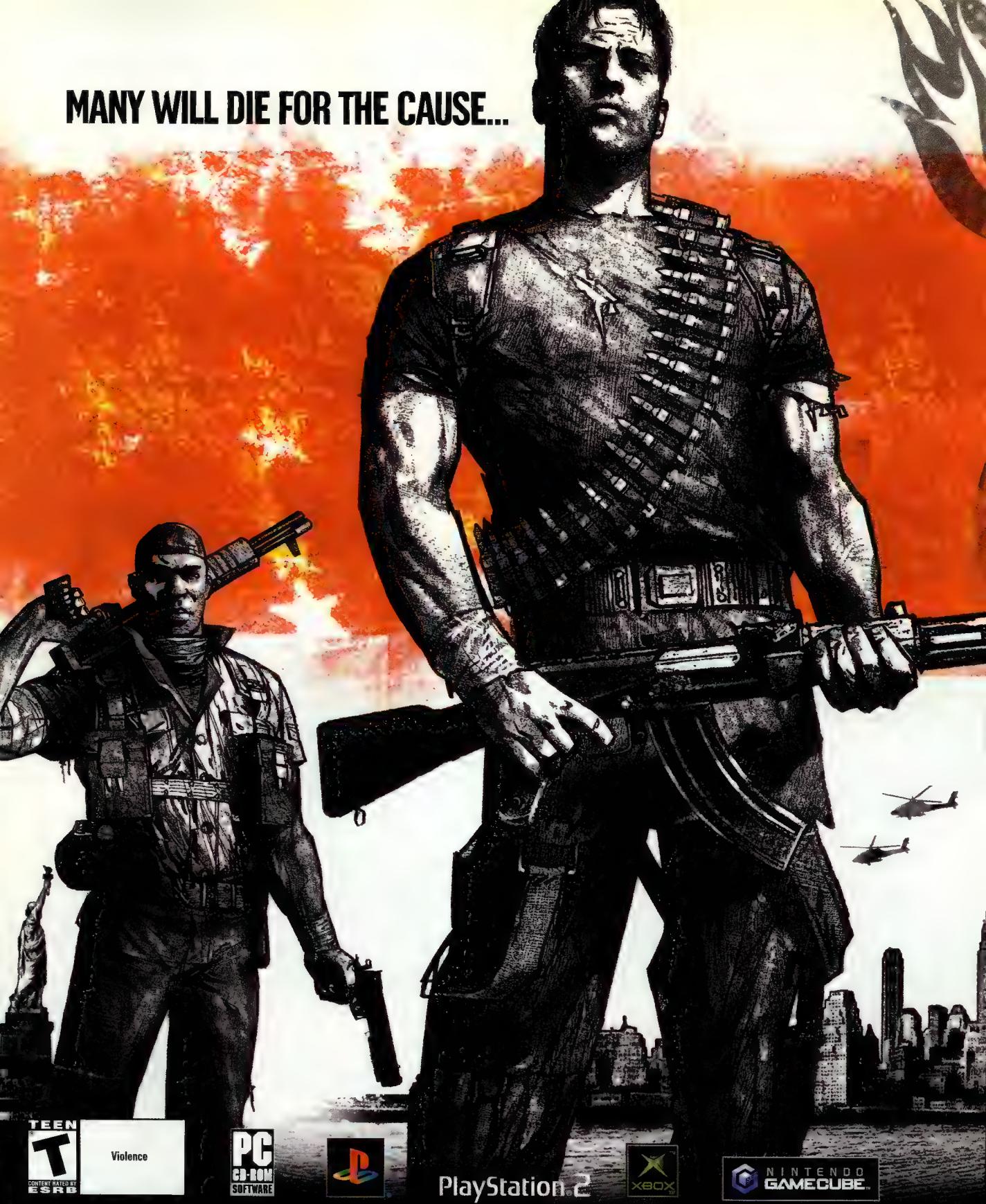
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MANY WILL DIE FOR THE CAUSE...



Violence



PlayStation 2



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97
98
99
2000
2001
2002

NEXT

INCOMING GAMES PREVIEWED



PREVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

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VOODOO VINCE	XB 036
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NBA JAM 2004	PS2/XB 036
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R-TYPE FINAL	PS2 044
SYBERIA II	PC 044



WARNING!

HAZARDOUS MATERIAL

Here at GMR, we preview games a little differently. To ensure that our previews are as relevant as possible, we only feature titles that will be released within six months. We also record our level of excitement about the game with cool little flames. Previews are not reviews—they're merely a guide as to how good a game-in-progress is looking. It's a snapshot. If we're not very excited by it, the game receives one or two flames. If we're taking a wait-and-see attitude, expect to see three flames. Over and above that, you can bet we're pretty excited. It's our duty to tell you what we think at every stage of a game's development cycle—positive, negative, or somewhere in between.



RELEASE | NOVEMBER

ARMED AND DANGEROUS

SYSTEM PC/XB PUBLISHER LUCASARTS DEVELOPER PLANET MOON STUDIOS

GUNG HOEDOWN

→ "I'm gonna make ya eat guts! Eat guts!" Not a line we suggest you try on a first date (second, maybe), but then if you're one of the characters in LucasArts' latest action romp, dating is the last thing on your mind. Blowing stuff up is first. And possibly second.

Forged in the madcap *Monty Python-meets-Dark Star* brains of the tiny Planet Moon Studios gang, *Armed and Dangerous* is the most fun we've had in the office since James entered Gerry for Best in Show alongside Andrew's Pekinese. Planet Moon has created some of the most bizarre and delightful action games

of recent years, beginning with PC shooter *MDK* in 1997 and, um...ending with *Giants: Citizen Kabuto* in 2000. With, well, not much in between. It's not exactly prolific, but the team is known industrywide for strong characters, rampant imagination, and wisecracking. Lots of wisecracking.

The plot, although thoroughly incidental next to the orgy of ridiculous destruction, follows the misadventures of a team of four mercenaries out for cash who suddenly find themselves the last hope of a planet enslaved by evil orclike dudes with bows and arrows. Cue mass destruction.

You know things are going well

when you cycle through your weapons on one level and find you have a Shark gun at your disposal. Firing the gun results in a broad fin cutting through the landscape toward your hapless victim and then submerging. A half-second later, an enormous shark appears and has your target and his pals for lunch. On another level, which consists (as most of them do) of lots of shooting and running about, you can use the Topsy Turvy gun to turn the entire level upside down. The enemies fall off. You don't. The format may not be original (it's a good old-fashioned vertical 2D shooter, Commando-

style—made in 3D), but the weapons and tactics certainly are.

Although you can't play as your varied teammates, you can give them simple orders, and the effect is reminiscent of Microsoft's recent *Brute Force*, but with one crucial difference: It's fun.

The early preview version we sampled displayed Planet Moon's trademark loony artwork and was hard as nails. We'd bet your brains on this being a Christmas cracker. ■

GMA SAYS → Planet Moon and LucasArts are a match made in heaven. We expect this one to be very good indeed.

→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥

XB
PC

RELEASE | OCTOBER

SSX 3

SYSTEM GC/PS2/XB PUBLISHER EA DEVELOPER EA CANADA

COOLER THAN ICE

→ Urban legend would have you believe that Eskimos have identified hundreds of different types of snow, and though these legends have been disproved, no one told Electronic Arts. Thank God. After seeing SSX 3's rendition of snowy mountains, it comes as no surprise that EA's Vancouver-based studio has hired an Oscar-nominated visual-effects artist to create this crystalline rendition of the sport of snowboarding. The tiny sparkles on SSX 3's powdery hills are intentional this time, not just graphical glitches. Tumbling snow boulders force you to Indiana Jones your way out of caves, ice glistens with reflections, and packed surfaces have a hardness you can really feel.

In fact, our hands-on test of an early Xbox version of SSX 3 reveals creative confidence and competence surpassing both the impressive SSX and its bolder sequel, *Tricky*. Unless you select the Quick Start stage select option, SSX 3's new interface abruptly drops you onto a mountain peak and lets you ride down at your own pace, casually offering signs and landmarks to steer you toward structured races or trick events you might enjoy. Events range from short to extended endurance sessions, with weather conditions that worsen dramatically as challenges are completed and new mountain peaks are opened.

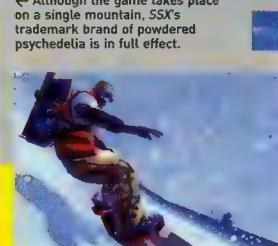
Weather is only one of the ways SSX 3 visibly blows past its predecessors, although the blizzards, lightning

strikes, and whiteouts are unquestionably among its most dazzling improvements. Characters have improved more subtly, with added clothing animations, outfits, new moves, and new people. And then there are the falling trees. And bridges full of cars. And birds, planes, and helicopters in the sky. All without noticeable draw-in and frequently coupled with slick camera tricks lifted from *Tricky* and *The Matrix*. In short, unlike the series' previous games, SSX 3 makes you feel like you're in the center of a world that was alive and exciting before you even arrived there.

The believable environment is enhanced by the audio, a deft mix of licensed electronica tracks and occasional deejay-style commentary about in-game goings on. Suspension of disbelief is interrupted only by the new trick system, which—like *Tricky*'s—enables players to pull off death-defying midair Uber moves, this time extending combos even more implausibly. Hand plants and rail-based Ubers push the reality envelope that much further. On that note, we're hoping EA continues to tighten the control, which unnecessarily pushes the Xbox controller a bit too far for newbies. The only other thing missing at this stage is the feeling of actually being cold. But the game's not finished yet. ←

GMA SAYS → Do we sound excited enough already? We are.

→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥🔥



←

Although the game takes place on a single mountain, SSX's trademark brand of powdered psychedelia is in full effect.

THREE BOARDERS, ONE CROWN

→ 1080° may have defined the genre, but SSX and Amped redefined it—here's how the competition stacks up.

1080° Avalanche: The much-delayed sequel to Nintendo 64's *1080°* gets incrementally better with each showing, promising more dynamic environments than SSX 3 but little else.

Amped 2: Microsoft earns a "much improved" mark for its impressively detailed follow-up to launch title *Amped*, but the final verdict is still out on the fun factor. ←



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have a threesome in
the back of a cab?



Approximate size

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RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

VOODOO VINCE

SYSTEM XB PUBLISHER MICROSOFT DEVELOPER BEEP INDUSTRIES

DO THE VOODOO. THE XBOX DO

→ Novel concepts can be difficult to execute. Readers will recall last year's *Blink*, which struggled mightily to build a game around TiVo-style rewinding and fast-forwarding.

With *Voodoo Vince*, Microsoft is once again betting big on a 3D platformer with a novel concept. Unlike Mario, Sonic, and other action heroes, *Voodoo Vince*'s titular voodoo doll is impervious to physical harm. In fact, Vince intentionally stabs himself with pins and runs around in flames near gasoline. Eventually, even fan blades and crusty machines become enticing rather than threatening—all nice twists. Only evil magic breaks Vince's stride.

But with so many forgettable, quasi-edgy 3D platformers flooding

store shelves (remember *Dr. Muto*? No?), Vince will need more than a few good ideas if he's going to stand out. Luckily, in addition to a consistently solid audiovisual presentation, an early build's action puzzles already demonstrate genuine spunk. However, other scenes feature barely enough enemies and collectable items to keep players occupied while they move between major objectives, and the dialogue could use some help before release. Does the world really need another cockeyed antihero spouting kid-friendly wisecracks? It seems that's what Microsoft wants—and it may be what Xbox needs. **IC**

GMA SAYS → Get ready to stick a fork in him; he's almost done.

→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥



NBA JAM 2004

SYSTEM PS2/XB PUBLISHER ACCLAIM DEVELOPER ACCLAIM AUSTIN

The *Jam* series' trademarks are here: authentic ballers from the past and present, plenty of dazzling dunks from downtown, and perhaps most importantly, a medium for unmitigated trash talk. The roster includes more than 50 NBA legends, like Wilt Chamberlain and Larry Bird, plus you can play in different eras, like the sepia-toned '50s or the psychedelic '70s, with unique special effects and commentary for each.

RELEASE | SEPTEMBER



RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

BACKYARD WRESTLING

SYSTEM PS2/XB PUBLISHER EIDOS INTERACTIVE DEVELOPER PARADOX DEVELOPMENT

DAYS OF BARBED WIRE AND BRUISES

→ "Don't try this at home," the warning screen for Eidos' bloody brawler *Backyard Wrestling* implores. Unashamed in its brutality, *Wrestling* captures the madcap antics of the crazy brave who've taken to wrestling in underground no-holds-barred fights.

Violent? *Wrestling* makes organized warfare seem like a Boy Scout jamboree. Barbed-wire bats break brains and bust blood vessels. Thumbtacks are good to sprinkle on the floor before you slam some dumb fool onto it. Light bulbs smash up real good on a sap's face. Gas tanks, if properly shattered, provide the flames needed to turn the other guy from, say, Insane Clown Posse's

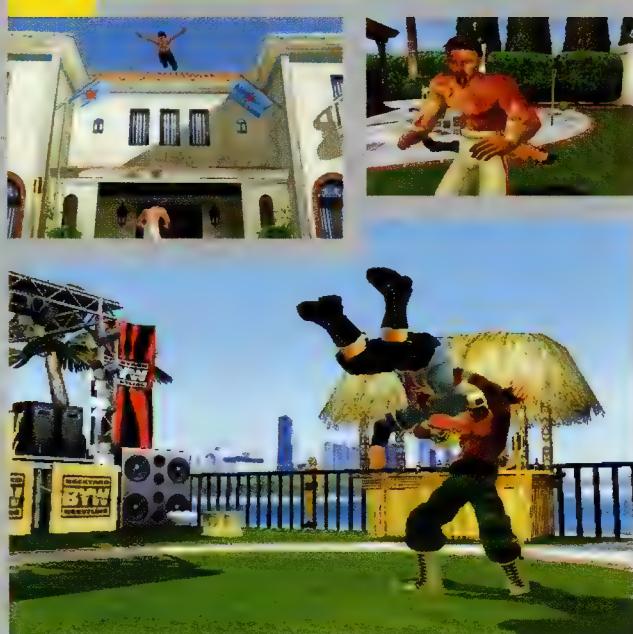
Violent J into Marvel Comics' Human Torch. Burn, baby, burn.

More than 20 wrestlers, including hardcore icons Sabu and Mad Man Pondo, are packaged here along with multitermed venues such as a nudie bar, truck stop, and mansion. A Talk Show career mode puts the mayhem into context, and would-be practitioners of the punishing arts can even create their own fighters.

Unfortunately, an early version of the game was too raw to judge properly, so the jury's out as to whether this one will be bloody good fun or just a spurting wound. **IC**

GMA SAYS → Take two chair shots and call us in the morning.

→ HOW HOT... 🔥



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* 2 Player mode requires each player
to use a separate Game Pak.



Cartoon Violence

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BANDAI

RELEASE | OCTOBER

T.M.N.T.

SYSTEM GC/PC/PS2/XB PUBLISHER KONAMI DEVELOPER KONAMI

SHELLO, OLD FRIENDS...

→ It's somewhat surprising how well the *Turtles* franchise stands up in the 21st century. Thanks to a grittier look and the fact that the '80s surfer lingo has been left where it belongs, Master Splinter and the boys don't seem dated at all. *TMNT* is based on the new Fox animated series, which itself is based on the original comic book (no April O'Neil in a yellow jumpsuit, sorry). The same voice actors from the cartoon also lend their talents to the game, and with the multiple fully animated cut-scenes, it feels as though you're playing through

a full-fledged episode.

We've worked about halfway through a playable version of *TMNT*, and while it's plenty fun to dismantle wave after wave of mousers and street punks—especially with a teammate—there's not much beyond mindless combat. Not that that's necessarily a bad thing—we just fear that all the punching and kicking could grow stale as the game progresses. That would make us shell disappointed. **IE**

GMA SAYS → Best played at 9 a.m. with a big bowl of Fruit Loops.

→ HOW HOT...



RELEASE | OCTOBER

D&D HEROES

SYSTEM XB PUBLISHER ATARI DEVELOPER ATARI

IF JUST FOR ONE DAY...

→ We admit it: *Dungeons and Dragons* is cool only to a certain group of people. And that's OK; we all have our hobbies and interests. But for those of us who might not get off on the whole 34-sided-die-rolling thing, Atari's Hunt Valley studio is condensing the *D&D* experience into a *Gauntlet*-style multiplayer dungeon hack that's more appealing to the masses.

The story is a rather reliable standby: A madman is trying to resurrect a great evil, and it's up to you to stop him. (Lazy bastard. Whenever we need some evil, we produce it ourselves.) Up to four players can join or leave the festivities at any time, roleplaying as a cleric, fighter, rogue, or wizard. Naturally, each character class has its own strengths and weaknesses (regarding speed, strength, spells, and so on), so

a balanced team is your best bet. **IE**

GMA SAYS → We're suckers for cooperative play, even if it's *D&D*.

→ HOW HOT...



RELEASE | OCTOBER

NBA LIVE 2004

SYSTEM GC/PC/PS2/XB PUBLISHER EA SPORTS DEVELOPER EA CANADA

WHO'S GOT GAME?

→ If we had handed out a Comeback of the Year award in 2002, *NBA Live* would've been the sports recipient. EA's franchise rebounded big time to become a solid contender once again for the premier b-ball game.

This year, to add to the game's standard graphical face-lifts and increased feature set (which comes with each new edition), the off-the-ball action will be receiving a complete overhaul. The developers have motion-captured 10 players at

once to give the court a more realistic feel. So, expect to see a lot of pushing and shoving as post players battle for position and defenders fight wildly through screens. Plus, a killer new move called Pro-Hop has been added to your repertoire. When it's executed correctly, you can drive through the lane and avoid shot blockers with absolute ease. **IE**

GMA SAYS → EA's round baller may be able to reclaim home-court advantage from Sega.

→ HOW HOT...

MARIO PARTY 5

SYSTEM GC PUBLISHER NINTENDO DEVELOPER NINTENDO

It's time again for the party that never stops, apparently. Mario and friends love to get down with their funky selves, while charging you \$50 every time just to watch. *Mario Party 5* has new game boards, over 60 new minigames, and new playable characters. Just don't be upset when a belligerent Luigi pukes all over your new couch. The man can't hold his sauce.

RELEASE | DECEMBER



INTENSE?
TO PUT
IT KINDLY.

BREAK OUT OF



BREAK OUT
TRICKS THE ORDINARY

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PS2, XBOX, GC
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GARAGEKING

unlocks all bike parts



NOT YOUR ORDINARY GAME

I-NINJA

PS2, GC

If attention to medieval detail, stealth kills and gore aren't your idea of a good time, give Namco's new I-Ninja a try. Instead of trying to best the traditional ninja game, Namco just has fun with it. Your ninja (named "Ninja") must avenge the murderer of his beloved ninja teacher...who just happens to be himself. What can we say? These things happen.

The gameplay of I-Ninja is fast, hip, clever and tons of fun. Instead of a dark tale of vengeance, Ninja happily cuts enemies in half with his giant sword, throws shuriken and blows darts at them, all the while performing stunts that you'd expect to see in a game starring Tony Hawk. He can slide down rails, act like a human bowling ball, out-box Mike Tyson and even jump over deadly traps with the skill of a certain Italian plumber. Not even Jackie Chan has moves like his.



NEED
CODES



AGGRESSIVE INLINE

PS2, KIDS, GC

Get Mega Points

To get a ton of points on The Boardwalk, go to the tunnel with the skull and grind the side of it. Then, when your multiplier gets to 60 you jump off and watch your points rack up big time.

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Successfully complete all challenges (normal and hidden) on every level to unlock the Power Skates. The Power Skates give you one blue stat point for every attribute.

Ultra Skates

Successfully complete all the levels with 100% to unlock the Ultra Skates. The Ultra Skates give you another blue stat point for every attribute.

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RELEASE | NOVEMBER

TRUE CRIME

SYSTEM GC/PS2/XB PUBLISHER ACTIVISION DEVELOPER LUXOFUX

NOT-QUIET-AS-MEAN STREETS

→ This game has been called a *Grand Theft Auto* killer, but let's face it: There will be no GTA killer. The *GTA* series' inherent freedom opened our eyes to an entirely new kind of gameplay. Their place in the annals of videogaming is assured. They are not killable, woundable, or even bruiseable.

But it's easy to see why *True Crime* invites such comparisons. After all, we drive around in carjacked (excuse us—commandeered) vehicles. On foot, we trade bullets with underworld henchmen and rival gangs. Tons of optional missions allow us to fill the time between required story-driven missions as we see fit.

The chief difference between Rockstar's ruckus and Activision's adventure is tone. *True Crime* takes place in a real city with a more plausible plot. Its hero is former LAPD officer Nick Kang, who's now a member of a quasi-legal undercover antimafia task force. Kang can shoot first and ask questions never, or he can let fists fly first, then press foes for information once his chop-socky has put them in a more conversational mood. Over time, Kang learns new fighting techniques, including grapples and disarming, as well as stunt-driving maneuvers.

In truth, the only crime found in our preview build was the controls. It was difficult to aim guns precisely, and too-realistic driving physics often had us wrapped around lampposts while the criminals sped away. Fortunately, Activision has pushed back the game's release, giving developer Luxoflux some time to polish this noirish tale to a dark, glossy sheen. **→**

GMA SAYS → Driving, shooting, and kung fu? Here's hoping the controls end up spot-on...

→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥

WARHAMMER 40,000: FIRE WARRIOR

SYSTEM PC/PS2 PUBLISHER THQ DEVELOPER KUJU

In the grim 41st millennium, three galaxy-spanning empires are constantly at war. *Fire Warrior* follows a single day in the life of an inexperienced Tau Warrior named Kals, who is stranded in the enemy territory of the Imperium of Man. Use 15 futuristic weapons from the *Warhammer 40K* universe to stay alive, both offline and online. In eight-player Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, and Capture the Flag modes.

RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

INCOMING GAMES

true crime: streets of la. → project gotham racing 2 → warhammer 40,000: fire warrior

RELEASE | FALL

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

SYSTEM XB PUBLISHER MICROSOFT DEVELOPER BIZARRE CREATIONS

PHOTOREALISTIC FINISH

→ Project Gotham Racing, an Xbox launch title, aspired to be the *Gran Turismo* of Xbox, the must-have racing title for the platform. But for all the graphical polish, well-tuned physics, and carefully constructed tracks, PGR lacked GT's intrinsic quality. Yeah, it was a must-have if you owned an Xbox already, but it wasn't the kind of game you'd buy a console for, like GT3 was for PS2.

Fast-forward a couple of years, and Project Gotham Racing 2 is almost upon us. And while it's not exactly the *Gran Turismo* 4 beater that Xbox gamers would love to crow about, it's one of the best-looking and best-driving games out there for any console.

Why is PGR2 shaping up to be so much better than PGR? You could chalk it up to one word: more. As in more tracks, more

cities, more cars. All kinds of new cars are in the game, such as the Enzo Ferrari and BMW Z4, as well as classic cars such as the Pontiac GTO and Mercedes Gull Wing. Plus, the environments are more varied, with more than 10 cities represented, including Edinburgh, Stockholm, Chicago, and Barcelona.

You could also chalk it up to added features. Xbox Live support is front and center, with the ability to play head-to-head with your friends over the Internet and download ghost-car recordings made by the some of the best drivers in the world. The Kudos system has also been revamped, and new racing modes have been added. Sounds good to us. **→**

GMA SAYS → With an Xbox under the hood, Project Gotham Racing 2 will likely be a must-have for fans of realistic racing sims.

→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥



→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥



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EQO ADVENTURES: FRONTIERS

SYSTEM PS2 PUBLISHER SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT DEVELOPER SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

GET READY FOR REHAB!

→ You likely know the *Everquest* drill: Create a character, hook up with gamers from around the world for dungeon tunneling (or casual encounters), and amass booty and experience along the way. The follow-up to last year's PS2 edition expands the *EverQuest* world with three cities, 24 dungeons, and one entirely new continent, bringing the well-documented world of Norrath to an impressive 500 square miles.

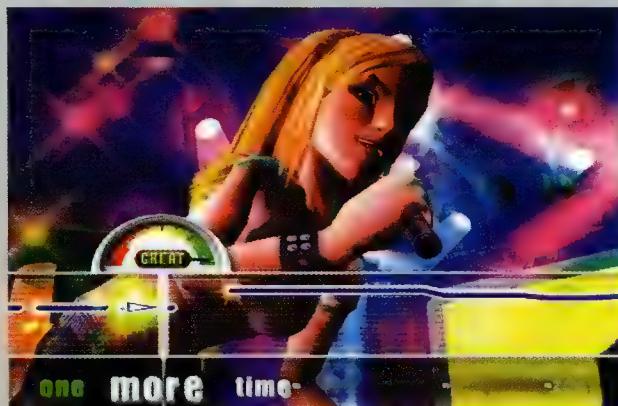
Other new features include an expanded tutorial, new NPC races to threaten with extinction (the Negas, Faun, and Couatl), as well as the requisite new items to buy, sell, and steal. There's a new character class: the potion-brewing Alchemist. Better

yet is the inclusion of a new playable race, the ogres. These charming fellows compensate for their (unwarranted, clearly) reputations as brainless brutes with the ability to sling magic just as well as they pulp folk.

Frontiers utilizes a completely redesigned version of the *EQOA* engine, which, frankly, could mean anything. From what we can tell, it'll likely look better—but not too much better—than its PS2 predecessor. Still, for those online adventurers who enjoy shooting the breeze as much as they like shooting everything in sight, that shouldn't matter too much. ■

GMA SAYS → A time-proven time killer.

→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥



RELEASE | NOVEMBER

KARAOKE REVOLUTION

SYSTEM PS2 PUBLISHER KONAMI DEVELOPER HARMONIX

PLAYSTATION IDOL

→ With its *Dance Dance Revolution* series, Konami proved to the world it could take a rather uninteresting concept and turn it into one helluva game. The company has done it again, this time with singing instead of dancing.

Featuring more than 30 licensed songs, *Karaoke Revolution* runs the gamut from classic tracks to current hits. Although all the vocals are provided by cover bands, you'll be hard-pressed to tell the difference between what's here and the original recordings. While budding superstars will probably be familiar with most of the game's songs, a few of the hotter hits, such as the Barenaked Ladies' "One Week," will throw you for a loop. There's nothing

like loading up a longtime favorite only to realize you've been singing the wrong lyrics for years.

Using a USB headset (the game works with either the SOCOM or Logitech headset), *Karaoke Revolution* actually listens to your voice and scores you based on the proper usage of tone and pitch. Much like *DDR*, your audience and applause increase with an impressive display. An onscreen guide lets you know how bad your warbling really is—just in case the shrill sound of screaming coworkers isn't enough. ■

GMA SAYS → Quite possibly the most fun you could have humiliating yourself in public.

→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥

→ HOW HOT... 🔥



CULDCEPT

SYSTEM PS2 PUBLISHER NEC DEVELOPER SEGA

It's your wildest dream come true in this earth-moving collision of board-game mechanics and *Magic: the Gathering*-style card battles. It's like chocolate in your peanut butter but better, man! Cast magic spells (you David Copperfield, you), raise magical servants to do your wizardly bidding, and baffle three other geekWOrz as you strive to collect the nearly 500 cards available in the game. Card art features the work of notable artists like Katsuya Terada (*Blood: The Last Vampire*).

RELEASE | NOVEMBER

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RELEASE | OCTOBER

RAINBOW SIX 3

SYSTEM XB PUBLISHER UBI SOFT DEVELOPER UBI SOFT MONTREAL

FPS OF THE YEAR? IT MIGHT BE

→ If you've ever played a Rainbow Six game before on either PC or Dreamcast, you know that rarely has the series' brand of tactical-ops gaming been equalled. You also know that even with a keyboard, the games' many hotkeys make managing your squad a stiff challenge, and on a console controller, it's nightmare inducing. But with *Rainbow Six 3* for Xbox, that's all about to change.

We're confident that between now and whenever *Halo 2* or *Doom III* decide to appear on Xbox, there will be no finer first-person shooter than

Rainbow Six 3. Positively. From the early build we played, the thought of taking a four-man team into black ops territory has never been so streamlined or exciting.

Taking the lead as everyone's favorite roughneck Ding Chavez, you take your specialized team through a series of taut, tactical missions, with objectives ranging from basic seek-and-destroy runs to hostage rescues. Thankfully, managing your team is a piece of cake, enabling you to keep it closely in tow or situated in covering fire positions at the touch of a button. Watching your team triangulate fire

or cover your blind spots from tactically superior positions is spine tingling, and the control is optimized to perfection.

The graphics and physics engine borrows from Ubi Soft's Unreal-based *Splinter Cell* technology, and the game puts it to great use. Lighting effects are stunning, character and weapon models look fantastic, and the enemy rag-doll animations are killer.

GMA SAYS → *Rainbow Six 3* might be the best FPS we've played all year. Believe it!

→ HOW HOT...



RELEASE | OCTOBER

XIII

SYSTEM GC/PC/PS2/XB PUBLISHER UBI SOFT DEVELOPER UBI SOFT

ANIMATION. ARTILLERY. AMNESIA

→ Hey, shooter fans. Looking for a vacation from Clancyland? How about a little story with your FPS? *XIII* tells the tale of an amnesiac killing machine—you—who might be responsible for the president's assassination. The story unfolds through frequent cut-scenes and a lot of well-written in-game dialog. Objectives range from the old standbys (find a key to this door! Woohoo!) to more interesting goals, like rescuing hostages or blowing up a submarine. Comics-inspired graphics and the funkiest background music since *No One Lives Forever* scratch us right where we itch.

Controls for switching weapons, using inventory items, and shootin' fools (and even for grabbing a fire extinguisher off the wall and playing some chump a one-note lullaby) work so well, we forgot them entirely. But as in

many other FPSs, jumping puzzles and ladders remain frustratingly difficult to navigate. On the plus side, the developers have managed to make throwing grenades feel just right—"Kaboom, you bastards! Rest in pieces." (Sorry.)

GMA SAYS → It's a story-driven shooter with solid controls and style to burn. We like!

→ HOW HOT...



SYBERIA II

SYSTEM PC PUBLISHER MICROSOFT DEVELOPER MICROSOFT

If adventure games on the PC are a dead or dying genre, nobody bothered to tell European developer Microïds. Its darkly beautiful *Syberia* (which is being ported to Xbox and PS2) was extremely well received, and by the looks of it, the follow-up, *Syberia II*, will be as well. Especially since French novelist and artist Benoit Sokal is once again guiding the project.

RELEASE | OCTOBER



→ HOW HOT...



RELEASE | FALL 03

R-TYPE FINAL

SYSTEM PS2 PUBLISHER EIDOS/FRESH GAMES DEVELOPER IREM

BYE-BYE, BYDO!

→ Despite the genres gradual decline, deep-space diehards can still choose from such first-rate shooters as *Ikaruga*, *Silphred*, and the forthcoming *Gradius*, courtesy of fan-favorite Treasure. But for many gamers, it's the arcade classic *R-Type*, with its deceptively simple gameplay mechanic (a mobile shield/weapons pod), that still reigns as king of the shooters. Now, the seminal series is making its return, courtesy of original developer Irem and Eidos' Fresh Games label, and it already has us as giddy as schoolgirls.

Much like *Contra: Shattered Soldier*, *R-Type Final* updates its side-scrolling action with crisp 3D graphics, fancy effects, and spot-on control, while maintaining the giant bosses, fantastic level design, and inherent gameplay (and challenge!) of the original games. As this will be series' final installment, Irem is paying homage to its fans by packing the disc with extras. Look forward to 50-plus unlockable fighters, customizable paint jobs and weapons payloads, extensive stats and galleries, and the Vs. A.I. mode in which you school your ship and watch it blast off and fight the evil Bydo empire!

GMA SAYS → The legend goes out in style.

→ HOW HOT...



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PlayStation 2



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A VIEW TO A

ROCKSTAR NORTH UPS THE BODY COUNT AGAIN WITH *MANHUNT*, THE MOST DISTURBING STEALTH-ACTION GAME EVER CREATED

→ It happens to every successful developer: Design a couple of major-league critical and commercial hits, and you earn the right to try something a little different. Polyphony Digital did it—after *Gran Turismo*, the company created the *Panzer Dragoon*-like mech-shooter *Omega Boost*. And following *Metal Gear Solid*, Hideo Kojima took his own detour into mech territory with the *Zone of the Enders* series.

So perhaps it was the creative urge to try something new that inspired Rockstar North (maker of the *Grand Theft Auto* series) to take a slight breather from its moneymaker and trample on fresh, new soil. Which brings us neatly to *Manhunt*.

Imagine *Shadowman*, *Max Payne*, and *Metal Gear Solid* colliding in a musky death-row orgy, and you've pretty much

got *Manhunt*. In fact, the game's opening scene is set on death row. *Manhunt*'s protagonist, James Earl Cash, has been sentenced to death by lethal injection. Ordinarily, once the sodium pentothal kicks in, it's a one-way ticket to wherever one goes when one eats the salt drip. But in the case of Mr. Cash, it's a carefully designed ruse.

Cash awakens from what should have been a long dirt nap and finds himself in a quiet room. He hears a voice over a loudspeaker—the voice of someone known only as the Director, a mysterious "benefactor" whose ulterior motives are more than a little sinister. For the trouble of saving your life, he sets you up in an abandoned warehouse in a seedy burg known as Cancer City. Scattered throughout this menacing environment are video cameras

recording your every move—and you're sharing Cancer City with roving packs of Hunters, your principal enemies in the game. The name of the game is kill or be killed, and every moment is recorded for the sick delight of the Director.

In practice, the game functions something like a stripped-down *Metal Gear* set in the ghetto. Every enemy has a cone of vision, and should you traipse into view, they will come a-runnin'. Should they catch you, they will almost certainly inflict heavy damage, especially if multiple enemies are on the case. So the best course of action is stealth.

Like any stealth game worth its salt, *Manhunt* features a diverse set of ground textures. Since silence is of the utmost importance, it's crucial to pay close attention to the surface on which you're walking. Pavement is relatively quiet, but

put a foot down on gravel, and the decibels go up.

Naturally, the payoff for all this tactical maneuvering (pressing flat up against walls, peering around corners, etc.) is sneaking up on your prey so that you can jack him. When you've crept up close enough behind your target, the Director gives the go-ahead through an earpiece. At that moment, you press the Action button and watch as any number of murderous animations are unleashed. One particularly brutal death sequence shows Cash driving a machete into his buddy's ribs before delivering three hard chops to his neck, ultimately decapitating him. A Mature rating is guaranteed.

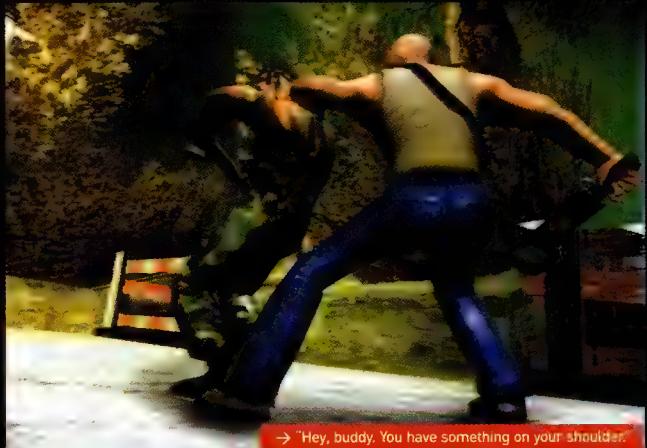
The gameplay benefits from a simple lock-on system that allows you to keep your principal target in sight while using slower, stronger attacks or quicker,



← Faced with a pack of dudes wearing clown masks in a derelict warehouse, James Earl Cash has certainly seen better days.

THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME
on the set with manhunt

KILL



weaker hits. Blocking is automatic, and Cash can spin 180 degrees around at the touch of a button.

But who wants to play when one can stay? And to that end, *Manhunt* provides many means by which to dispatch your foes. There's a limit to the number of weapons Cash can carry, but among his lethal options are baseball bats (considered long-range weapons), crowbars (medium-range), shards of glass (short-range), and blackjack (which can be stored in his pocket). Household items can be used for ultrasilent kills (e.g., Cash suffocating his prey with a plastic bag).

Bodies must be disposed of in the proper fashion (i.e., dragged into the shadows) lest a corpse's allies discover it and then launch into full-alarm mode and actively seek you out. That's a headache you don't need.

Later levels mix things up by providing a character (warning: drug reference approaching) called the White

THE SUCCESS OF MANHUNT WILL DEPEND SOLELY ON THE DEPTH, AND NOT THE GRATUITOUS DEATH, OF ITS GAMEPLAY

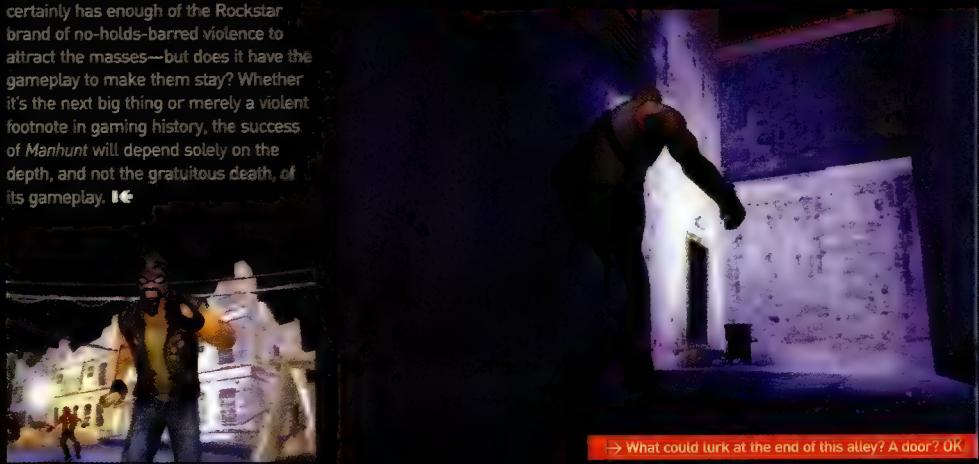
Rabbit. Rockstar North acknowledges *Alice in Wonderland* as an influence, due to its trippy nature and hallucinogenic state. So, what's challenging about chasing a dude in a white bunny suit? In order to keep up with him, you have to run. And by running, you 1) make lots of noise and 2) deplete your stamina. In short, it's tougher than it sounds.

Manhunt is divided into levels, which is a significant change of pace from *GTA*'s more languid open-ended structure. But the goal is for Cash to uncover the reason the Director saved his life, as well as for gamers to find out whether Cash is truly guilty of the crimes for which he was sentenced to death.

Scheduled to ship for PS2 in late October or early November, *Manhunt* certainly has enough of the Rockstar brand of no-holds-barred violence to attract the masses—but does it have the gameplay to make them stay? Whether it's the next big thing or merely a violent footnote in gaming history, the success of *Manhunt* will depend solely on the depth, and not the gratuitous death, of its gameplay. **IC**



→ Neo-Nazis wearing confederate flag masks? Oh my.



COURAGE UNDER FIRE

WITH THE INDUSTRY EVOLVING AND THE PSP ON THE HORIZON, IS THE NINTENDO WAY STILL THE RIGHT WAY?

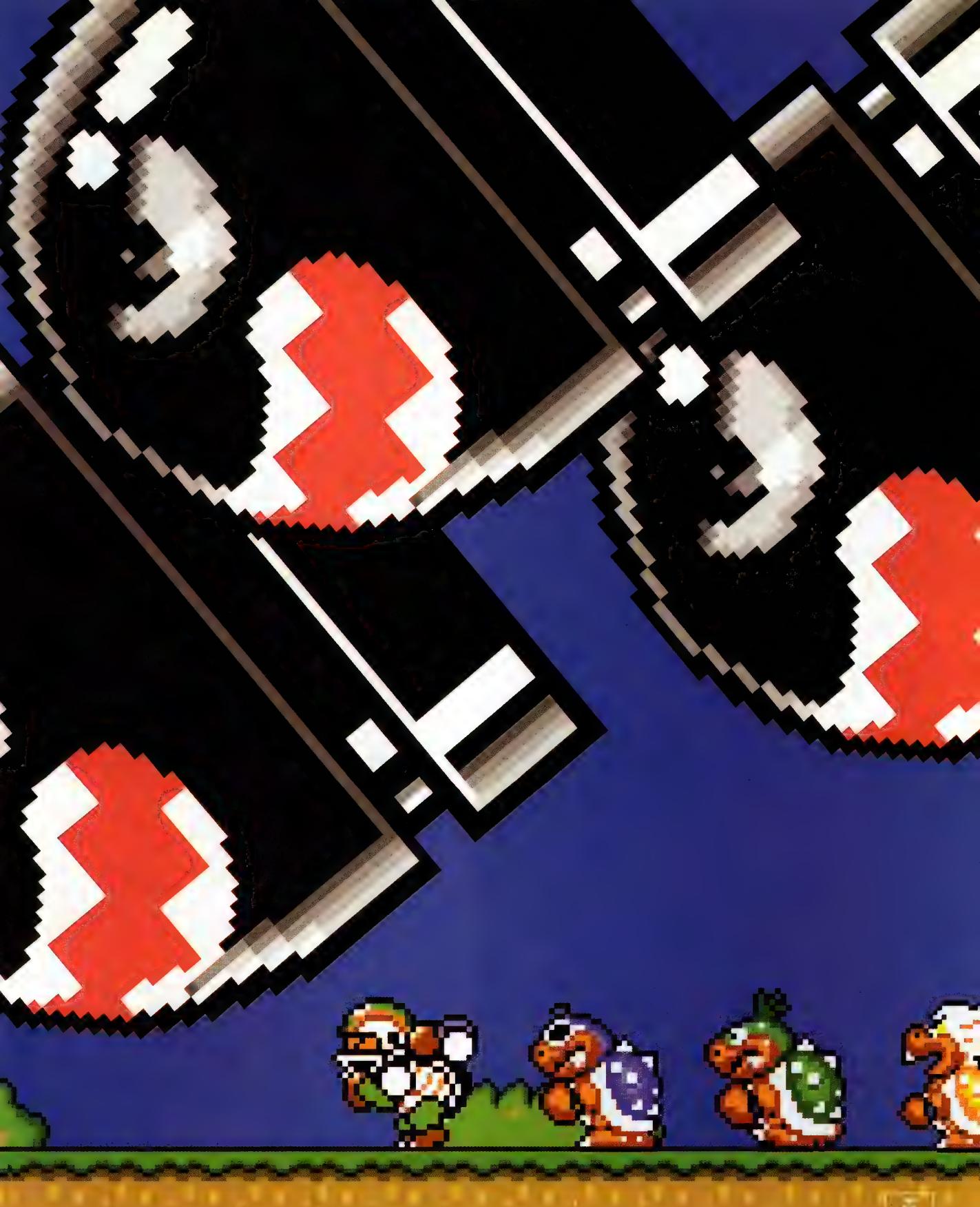
"NINTENDO WANTS IT ALL, AND WE DON'T THINK THERE'S ANY REASON THAT WE SHOULDN'T HAVE IT ALL."

Strong, but maybe not unfamiliar words from the company that revived and ruled the videogame industry in the 1980s. "If you look back to the beginning," says Perrin Kaplan, Nintendo of America vice president of marketing, "we were all happy campers. Everyone made a lot of money, and a lot of products were sold." Oh, Nintendo is still making a lot of money (over \$550 million of profit in the first part of 2002, as the company enjoys pointing out), but due to various missteps and blunders during the 1990s, it's no longer the singular dominant force in today's videogame market. Sony's PlayStation brand rules the majority of the world's growing gaming population, as well as the majority of third-party software publishers. And Sony now faces stiff competition from Microsoft, a newcomer to the console market, which has billions of dollars to spend on success. Yet in the face of such adversity—and as the ever-growing game industry adapts to the changes of the 21st century—Nintendo proudly continues

to do things its own way, just like it did more than 100 years ago.

Is this the right direction for the company to take? Is it a sound business plan to deviate from the path Sony and Microsoft want to follow? Recently, a sentiment spreading throughout the industry holds that Nintendo is marching its own way right out of the home-console business. This perception was only fortified by Nintendo's GameCube display at E3, which bore no striking resemblance to what Sony was showing at the PlayStation booth. And you certainly couldn't have confused GameCube's lineup with what Microsoft's Xbox had to offer. While the two corporate giants heavily promoted their lineups of simulation racing games, first-person shooters, sequels to popular first- and third-party franchises, and numerous online games (which may well be the Next Big Thing), Nintendo capped off its press conference with a demonstration of...uh, *Pac-Man*. The question "What are they thinking?" remains a common one. ■





PARTY PREPARATIONS

The key to general success for any console manufacturer lies in third-party software. Historically, Nintendo admits, third-party support has been "a little slim." We'd agree. But Kaplan continues to say, "Now I think we've changed our mindset and are embracing third parties quite a bit more." GMR asked a few third-party publishers what they think about today's Nintendo. Jeff Brown, VP of corporate communications at Electronic Arts, says: "We just don't see Nintendo's future as all bad. They've got a ton of first- and third-party games in development, a red-hot handheld that connects to the GameCube, and, contrary to the doom and gloom forecasts, a solid installed base. If industry history tells us anything, it's not to bet against Nintendo." Not everyone shares that view, though. From an anonymous executive at a prominent Japanese publisher: "By severely limiting the capabilities of their console, underestimating the feature demands of today's gaming consumer, and not having a well-defined online gaming solution, Nintendo faltered with the design and marketing of the GameCube. The problem is that for the vast majority of gamers, their emotional connection to the Nintendo brand and image has eroded. We will need to see a complete overhaul of their brand and market positioning, a rebirth if you will, before we see Nintendo's return to market dominance."



→ *Geist*, *Fire Emblem*, and *Custom Robo*. It's only three "mature" games, but it's a start.



→ among industry analysts, journalists, Internet message boards, schoolyards, and game stores across the country. GMR thought it was a good time to go straight to Kaplan and NOA PR Manager Tom Hartlin, and find out exactly what Nintendo is thinking about its future as a game company—and whether or not the Nintendo way is still the right way.

WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?

Not surprisingly, Nintendo has multiple takes on its current status in the console war. "There are three different ways we can look at that," says Kaplan. "One would be how we are doing financially, and we're clearly No. 1. Second, where are we perceptionwise, and we suffer being third there. And then the third is the actual reality of the market share, and I'd say that we're No. 2 worldwide."

That Nintendo perceives itself to be in first, second, and third place, clearly demonstrates that this is a complicated issue. Sony obviously leads the pack in terms of worldwide market share, positive perception, and third-party support. But trailing Sony is understandable—PlayStation has been the dominant force in the industry since the late 1990s and shows few signs

that it'll be giving that up anytime soon. Microsoft, on the other hand, is the new kid on the block—and, at least in the United States, that company holds an image advantage over Nintendo. Xbox also enjoys a lead over GameCube of roughly 1 million units shipped to American retailers. Running virtually neck-and-neck with one of the largest and most aggressive corporations in the world for the precious few console dollars Sony doesn't get ought to be Nintendo's primary concern.

FEUDING NEIGHBORS

Yet, when it comes to Bill's billions, Nintendo doesn't seem the slightest bit worried. "Even a company as strong as Microsoft has had trouble penetrating this business," says Kaplan. "There's no company in the world that could do what Microsoft has done. [No other company has] the financial wherewithal, [has] the other parts of the company propping it up, has shareholders that would allow them to have a product where you're basically paying the consumer to buy it...they will lose [money] into perpetuity, period."

This perceived financial advantage over Microsoft—based on the belief that it will never make a profit on Xbox—seems to be

"There's no company in the world that could do what Microsoft has done."



COURAGE UNDER FIRE

GMA asks Nintendo what its deal is

the reason Nintendo is so confident that its conservative and efficient business model will keep it alive in the never-ending console war. "We're very well run that way," Kaplan explains. "We're always making a profit on our hardware; we don't just live to make profit on the software." In essence, Nintendo is betting on Microsoft's shareholders unwillingness to tolerate more massive losses if Xbox 2 doesn't take off.

Aside from the financial aspect, isn't Microsoft's image of having games such as *Halo* and *Doom III*, which are more appealing to an adult demographic, an advantage Nintendo lacks? Apparently not, according to Kaplan. "Because they chose to do that, they chose to pick a certain segment of the demographic, and Microsoft is having a heck of a time expanding out of that. That's their niche, the older guy." And it seems there's

"In hindsight, maybe people thought it looked a little bit like a lunchbox."

some credence to that—the first batch of games Rare is making for Xbox—games Microsoft promoted heavily during its press conference and at its booth at E3—would have been a perfect fit for GameCube. Again, the perception problem: Nintendo is too focused on kids and Microsoft is too focused on adults. Where is the valuable common ground? "When we increase our market

share, it's not from Microsoft. It's from Sony. There are people turning 6 every day, and we want to capture those players," says Kaplan. "There are people turning 26, and we want to continue to have games for them." The problem draws similarities to American politics. A candidate must lean far left or right in the beginning to win over the core base, but to win the general election, you have to be appealing across the board. Nintendo claims it's starting to realize this: "We have the same stuff everyone else does, but because of the perception, people don't go looking."

DITCHING THE LUNCHBOX

So, how does Nintendo fix its perception problem? To start, it can look at the mistakes it's made with GameCube. There

are plenty of reasons GameCube is seen as a console for kids, but the most obvious one is the look of the hardware itself. Kaplan admits, "Maybe our color choice for the hardware was not of instant appeal to everybody." No kidding. If you've seen a Nintendo advertisement in the past few months, you may have noticed that the purplish-blue has been replaced by a far sexier platinum—a wise move, but the damage is already done. Nintendo learned the hard way that "cool" plays an important role in the minds of consumers. "In hindsight," she concludes, "maybe people thought it looked a little bit like a lunchbox."

On an equally fundamental level, Nintendo openly admits that, once again, it didn't have the software to support GameCube in the vital early months of its life. "Nintendo is known for quality games. If

we were able to come out with a lot of them close together, not keeping consumers in such anticipation to where it wears them down, we would have done better." But that's just Nintendo's in-house games. What about the numerous third-party games that were available but overlooked at launch? Tom Harlin blames Nintendo for that as well. "We had good third-party support at launch. One of our perception problems is that a *Pikmin* or a *Smash Bros.* or a *Mario* or a *Zelda* game will overshadow, whether it's an ad at retail or coverage in the media, every other product that's available for GameCube." *Mario* and *Zelda* too popular? It sounds like a ridiculous problem. But as we saw in the N64 days, few games performed as well as *Super Mario 64* or *Ocarina of Time*. When GameCube arrived, many third parties no doubt remembered this and didn't even bother trying. That sentiment seems to be disappearing, thanks to Nintendo's new focus on third-party relations. "We spent more time looking inward at our own development than we did out at the third parties that could help us and what was in it for them," elaborates Kaplan. "We kind of forgot that times had changed a little bit."

Times have changed, and as we've seen so far, Nintendo's traditional ➤

THE NINTENDO 5

What's up with Nintendo's heavy hitting franchises?

► Super Mario

Absolutely nothing has been said about the next *Mario* game other than we'll see it next year at E3. If for some reason it doesn't appear, we'll take that to mean it's been pushed back for the launch of Nintendo's next system.



► Legend of Zelda

Nintendo just reconfirmed that the next *Zelda* game will be done and ready sometime in 2004. All signs point to this second game using *Wind Waker's* cel-shaded graphics, but that's all we know at this point.



► Metroid

We saw the first glimpse of Retro's *Metroid Prime* follow-up during E3. Unfortunately, Nintendo didn't have any interesting information to go along with the pretty pictures. Don't expect any news for a while.



► Pokémon

Pokémon Box, *Pokémon Stadium*, and *Pokémon Channel* are all coming to GameCube. None are RPGs. We'll ask this one more time: Where is the console *Pokémon RPG*? We'll pay you money for it.



► Donkey Kong

We believe Nintendo is still working on a new platformer, but late-breaking rumors point to Namco developing a music-based game featuring the DK crew. As long as the jungle rhythm moves us, it's all good.



GOOMBAS...

THROUGH PAINSTAKING ANALYSIS, GMR DISTILLS THE TOP FIVE CAUSES OF NINTENDO'S CURRENT TRIBULATIONS

05 TAKING ITS SWEET TIME

Nintendo took too long to develop games, and this really hurt it during the N64 days. Self-described "perfection disease" or not, GameCube is doing better in this regard, but the problem haunted the company at launch. "It's just too long to make people wait. Gamers love to play, and they like to play different things all the time. That probably was the largest error that Nintendo made. It was not that we didn't have good products, we just didn't have enough of them often enough," says Kaplan.

04 MARIO IS MISSING

Another thing Nintendo lacked at GameCube's launch was a *Mario* game, historical driver of hardware sales and the usual cause of mass hysteria in the gaming world. *Luigi's Mansion*, while quaint, didn't have nearly the same impact. And *Super Mario Sunshine*'s tropical setting and horrendous advertisement ("Clean is better than dirty!") came too little, too late. If *Mario 128* likewise fails to impress, we could be seeing the final relevant days of the world's most famous plumber. And that would be one of the saddest things ever.

03 BUCKING THE TRENDS

Nintendo doesn't agree with our assertion that it needs to be more aggressive with online gaming (not at this point, anyway). Think of the online possibilities of *Mario Golf*, *Mario Kart*, *Advance Wars*, *F-Zero*, *Smash Bros.*...the list goes on. Nintendo assures us that "when we do something, you can be certain that it will be done in an A-plus manner." It obviously isn't going to be with this system, so if Nintendo nixes the idea of incorporating an Ethernet adapter into the next system, online *Kirby* will be stuck in Dreamland.

YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS 02

Nintendo has an image problem, this much is obvious. It has always been a PG-rated company, but the *Pokémon* explosion of 1998 propped up a G-rated image that it still has trouble scrubbing off. Launching GameCube in a kid-friendly shade of purple didn't help matters, but the company assures us that it has been making the necessary corrections for Round 2. That's only one part of it, though. Despite making recent strides with third-party publishers, compared to Microsoft and Sony, Nintendo still lacks substantial "mature" content.

01 SLOW ON THE DRAW



Nintendo will never live down the fact that it practically gave Sony leadership of the market in the mid-1990s. Had the SNES PlayStation deal not fallen through, Nintendo could still be reaping the financial benefits of a Sony alliance. But the real kick in the pants came when then-president Hiroshi Yamauchi insisted that the Nintendo 64 be cartridge based. Third parties would have no more of the high costs and low storage of cartridges, so they flocked to Sony's wide-open arms. The rest, as they say, is history. With the PSP looming in the distance, Nintendo should be praying every night that history never repeats itself.



...AND MUSHROOMS

...AND TO BE FAIR, WE PICKED THE TOP FIVE INDICATORS THAT IT'S TRYING TO MAKE THINGS BETTER

SOFTWARE FOR THE MASSES

05



01

HANGING TOUGH



We don't know if you've noticed it or not, but people these days don't have much patience. A reader wrote to us this month with the very same concerns: "After a few minutes of trying to explain things to [mom], it became very apparent to me how complex videogames have become." Satoru Iwata agrees—he just announced Nintendo's new focus on developing software that is easily accessible, yet also deep. Considering that the game that was stumping mom was *The Wind Waker*, the company has some work to do.

04 GEEK CHIC



It's so very, very cool. We had our reservations when we saw it for the first time, but the GBA SP has quickly become an integral part of the our daily commute to work, and we don't feel completely embarrassed by taking it out in public. If Nintendo really wanted to do something smart, it would design all future products with a similar aesthetic in mind. Too much of a toy to be completely cool, but too cool to be merely a toy. And most important, it's not purple.

03 MOVING TO THE BIG CITY



It's widely expected that Nintendo's new Tokyo development studio will not only take some of the pressure off of the world-famous EAD (Miyamoto's joint), it'll also start developing games that don't necessarily fit in the traditional Nintendo mold. That means no *Mario*, *Zelda*, or *Pokémon*. We want to see something different, be it a fresh take on an existing genre or something entirely new. Hopefully, it'll use the lively surroundings of Tokyo and the distance from Nintendo HQ in Kyoto as an advantage. Because when the folks are out of town, it's time to party....

02 STOP, COLLABORATE, AND LISTEN

Sega just finished *F-Zero GX*, Namco's hard at work (hopefully) on *Star Fox* and *Donkey Kong*, Silicon Knights is remaking *Metal Gear Solid*, and we're assured that other collaborations are underway. Not only does this help mend fences that might have been damaged in generations past, (wouldn't you love to work on a Nintendo franchise?), it also helps free up Nintendo's internal teams to focus on its main properties like *Mario* and *Zelda*. Considering the GameCube needs more software and how soon the next Nintendo console is going to launch, the company is going to need a lot of games in the next few years. Everybody needs to be in on the act, or once again Nintendo's own efforts will overshadow the rest.

It's difficult to argue against the soundness of Nintendo's business plan. Though its profits have been declining, it's still making gobs of money, thanks to *Pokémon* and the GBA SP. If Nintendo is right about Microsoft never making money on the Xbox venture and if its next system launch is more successful than the GameCube's debut, the company is in a good position to make good on the promises it's making now. But that's a big if, and it's too early to tell what's going to happen as the next generation begins to unfold. But it doesn't make good sense (common or business) for the company to close down hardware R&D at the first sign of a major challenge. As long as it continues to make a profit on hardware, Nintendo will remain a player in the home console game.



SECOND OPINIONS

"It's great that Nintendo is content to stay profitable, but I wonder how long it can sustain that, what with PlayStation and Xbox taking control of its one-time stranglehold on the console market and Sony's PSP handheld enticing older GBA gamers away next year. By the time Nintendo awakes from its contented slumber, it'll likely be left with the one product that Microsoft and Sony aren't interested in: playing cards. It's sad, 'cuz I love Nintendo, and it makes great games, but I hate the company's decisions."

Chris Johnston, News Editor
Electronic Gaming Monthly

Just as PlayStation was before it, PSP is a direct attack on Nintendo. While it may be pitched as "the Walkman for the 21st century," the PSP will also be the device for all of us who have grown up with the game industry and now crave more than sprite-based graphics from 1990. The GBA SP is great, but it's technology crammed into a simple device that still makes you buy a frickin' adapter if you want to use headphones. Conversely, the PSP is the Game Boy for adults. It's more than a PS1 squeezed into a handheld; it's a device that serves every kind of entertainment you'd want. Nintendo needs to take it seriously, or it'll lose what's left of its grip on videogaming culture."

John Davison, Editor-in-Chief
Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine

"We own 98 percent of the market. What's Sony going to do about it?"

► moneymakers don't seem strong enough to carry GameCube across the finish line alone. Hence, the attitude change and the new focus on promoting third-party software. When a game is released on all three consoles, the GameCube version usually sells the fewest copies, and that isn't particularly helpful when you want a user base to grow. "We probably would have spent a little bit more time [at GameCube's launch] being louder about the third-party games," Kaplan admits. "I think our challenge now is to make sure that people know we do have games for everyone."

HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT

While Nintendo has a nice long look in the mirror, Sony's making some plans of its own. Not content with merely ruling the home-console racket, it's got designs on Nintendo's long-reigning natural monopoly over the handheld market. But once again, Nintendo isn't worried. When asked about the threat PSP presents to Game Boy, Kaplan responds with confidence: "We always take competitors seriously. But with a 98 percent market share, the challenge is [Sony's]. That's not to say that we can sit and rest on our laurels—we can't. We are very well aware and always take it seriously." So what is Nintendo going to do? "You say 'What is Nintendo going to do about it?' We own 98 percent of the market. What's Sony going to do about it?"

Well, Sony's pretty much told everyone what it's going to do about it. Great graphics, an inevitable catalog of popular PS1 ports, music and movie playback, and connectivity with other Sony products. Still not worried? "Not to say that we're untouchable; we need to work very hard to protect the foundation of what we have," says Kaplan. "But Sony has to get the magic ingredients in the equation right, and that's going to be [the company's] challenge. Price point is critical, library is critical, portability is critical, battery life is critical, size is critical. If [Sony]

comes out with a system that does eight different things, you're talking about two different products." Visions of the early '90s dance through our heads—is Nintendo setting itself up for yet another massive loss of market share by ignoring Sony? The parallel evidence is hard to deny. "I can't predict the future," Kaplan continues. "It depends on what Sony is going to do. It also depends on what we're going to put in our next system. When we emerge with the next system, our intent is to continue doing what's right. It's an area where we're pretty secure about knowing what we're doing; we just have to continue doing that." It appears Nintendo isn't necessarily taking PSP lightly, but it remains quite confident in the ability of the Game Boy brand name to withstand new competition. One thing's for certain: If Sony manages to pack all of its promises into a unit that sells for between \$100 and \$150, Nintendo had better know what it's doing. There are about 50 million PlayStation 2s out there, and Sony's likely to target PSP for sales of that same large number.

THE FUTURE IS ALMOST NOW

We can't predict the future either, but that won't stop us from trying. Nintendo seeks the right balance of relying on what works and shedding the negative image that its mentality is forever stuck in the glory days of the 1980s. GMR expects online gaming will ultimately determine Nintendo's fate: Sony and Microsoft both claim online gaming is what gamers want, but Nintendo wants to wait until it can make money from it. If Nintendo is as concerned with its image as it claims to be, then at the very least, shouldn't it appear to care about the online issue? "To venture into something that will cause you to lose a lot of money still doesn't make sense for Nintendo," Kaplan begins. "I don't know how long Microsoft or Sony can continue doing online, and I don't know how long it's going to take for them to make a profit." But



SECOND OPINIONS

Permanently. It's hard to believe how much better your life can be when you've got a Viewiful Joe. And it's even harder to believe that you can get one for less than \$100. So if you're having trouble getting over your love problem, visit us at www.viewiful.com. You'll find lots of great ways to make your love last. And if you do, we'll give you a free Viewiful Joe.

Shane Bettenhausen, Reviews Editor *Electronic Gaming Monthly*



when online gaming is finally a profitable venture, is there no danger that Microsoft's and Sony's early involvement in the process means they'll have it all to themselves? If you believe that, Kaplan replies. "You're making the assumption that behind closed doors, we're doing nothing. We have a huge R&D group, and it pays close attention to everything, all the time. There's a lot of work that continues to go on in every fashion, wireless and everything. We continue to work on all aspects [of online gaming] on a constant basis." And when Nintendo finally does make the jump, the company is confident that gamers (even the frustrated ones) will follow. "At the time when we do something, you can be certain that it will be done in an A-plus manner, whether it's on this system or the next system," says Kaplan.

And what about the next Nintendo console system? Kaplan believes one of the problems GameCube has had is Sony's big head start. "Nintendo is determined not to let that happen again," she emphasizes. Current rumors point to Sony launching PlayStation 3 sometime in late 2005—and Nintendo had better be ready by then, both with technically comparable hardware and a wide range of software from first- and third-party developers, or history may repeat itself. It's hard to imagine Sony losing leadership of the videogame market without making a massive blunder. Nintendo needs to leave the gate in top form because this will be the most significant product launch in

its history.

At a press conference held earlier this month, Nintendo Co. Ltd. President Satoru Iwata announced that in the spring of 2004, Nintendo will release the details of a "new videogame product"—Nintendo's "trump card," which will be "a new surprise that's substantially different from anything before." In the context of next-generation systems, these are incredibly lofty claims. It also clearly means that Nintendo doesn't plan to follow Sony and Microsoft into the battle for total domination of the world's living rooms. Even when introducing radical new products, Nintendo likes to do things its own way.

Much to the frustration of Nintendo fans around the world, it seems that, aside from putting forth extra effort in getting its "games for everybody" message across, Nintendo doesn't want to change its time-tested operating procedure in any significant manner. Kaplan puts the point across succinctly: "People say, 'Why don't you do what Microsoft does?' Well, that's never been Nintendo, and it will never be Nintendo." Nintendo will never take a loss on hardware—it would rather make games like *Pac-Man* instead of *Grand Theft Auto*, and it won't do something just because everyone else is doing it. This is the Nintendo way. Dedication to a conservative business plan, Nintendo believes, means that when this crazy console war ends and we all get to go home, "It's very, very likely that we'll be the last ones standing." 



→ Nintendo President Satoru Iwata has his work cut out for him. Many challenges await Nintendo in the next few years, and it's up to him to guide it through the storm. Plus, his sweater matches the GameCube. Nice.



KEYS TO SUCCESS

ADAPTATION. NOT GIVING UP YOUR CORE, BUT NOT IGNORING YOUR SURROUNDINGS. FIND BALANCE

→ In light of Mr. Iwata's comments regarding Nintendo's "trump card" announcement, the "unique and surprising" product to be unveiled next spring could very well be the next Nintendo home console. This, potentially, is a good thing. Nintendo can't afford simply to add everything that Sony and Microsoft have now and be done with it. The next Nintendo console needs to be not only technically on par with Sony and Microsoft's next boxes, but it also must have something that goes above and beyond the traditional aspects of gaming. In the meantime, *GMR* presents our take on what Nintendo ought to do...



WANT IT ALL? GET IT ALL TO STAY IN THE GAME, YOU HAVE TO PLAY THE GAME

People love Nintendo games, but as recent sales charts suggest, they need a more compelling reason to buy a Nintendo console. In order to build a healthy user base, Nintendo needs a blend of first-party games that are true blockbusters (in the *Mario 64* sense of the term), multiplatform titles that offer extra features the other versions don't, and significant third-party exclusives. As much as we appreciate the existence of *MGS: The Twin Snakes*, it's a game we've more or less played already. Nintendo needs games (properly promoted) that everyone else has, games everyone loves, and games nobody has seen before....



Grand Theft Auto: Vice City



Madden Football



Mario Kart: Double Dash!!



Rogue Squadron III



Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles



Metroid Prime



NBA Street Vol. 2



Metal Gear Solid 3



The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker



ONE IN EVERY HOME

BEHOLD, GMR'S VISION OF THE NEXT NINTENDO CONSOLE...



→ Though Nintendo's next console lacks an officially announced code name, we'll use the commonly accepted one being bandied about: the N5 (because it's Nintendo's fifth home console. Clever, no?). Evoking fond memories of the original NES design, GMR's approach was to maintain the youthful aspects of past Nintendo designs, while at the same time incorporate some of the better design elements of the GameCube: clean and pure geometric forms, only with a leaner profile. It maintains the easy access and logical placement of buttons, connections, and media drive.



• Top Down •

WHAT WE DID AND WHY WE DID IT

"Whoa, what did you do with the controller ports?" We tossed them. It's time to go completely wireless—RF receivers are built into the front legs and can support up to eight controllers. In the back, there are connections for digital and analog AV, optical audio, Ethernet, and USB. Game media is DVD (yes, you can watch movies, too), and that's loaded into the slot drive in the front of the unit. The two slots underneath the drive are multipurpose: They accept high-capacity memory storage (i.e. Panasonic SD cards) as well as serve as slots for the built-in Game Boy Player (GBC, GBA, and if there's time, GBA2). How close are we to the actual thing? We'll find out in due time....



• The Full Monty •



• The Backyard •

NO IDLE HANDS PREPARING THE NEXT GBA

You don't need MP3 or movie playback (though the possibility of expansion should be there), but the next Game Boy should be technically equal to the PSP. At the same time, you have to maintain backwards compatibility. Give third parties a reason to maintain exclusivity, or at the very least, let them be able to go multiplatform with handheld development. And since you seem to love connectivity so darn much, make the GBA2 instantly connectable to the N5 out of the box, and have at least three major launch titles support it in a meaningful way. And like it or not, Sony is targeting many of the people who bought the PS2, and there are about 50 million of those [so far]. Do not ignore the PSP.



NOW

REVIEWS YOU CAN USE



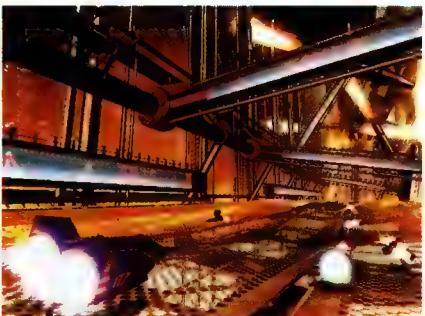
REVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

F-ZERO GX	PS2/XB	067
TRON 2.0	PS2/XB	068
HACK/OUTBREAK	PS2/XB	068
ALTER ECHO	PS2/XB	068
NHL 2004	PS2/XB	068
WWE NITZ PRO	PS2/XB/XC	068
ESPN NHL HOCKEY	PS2/XB	067
HOME GAMEKEEPER 2004	PS2	068
HIGHWAY 2004	PS2/XB/GC	068
WWE VIVA 2004	XB	069
PC EXPERT 2004	PS2	069
WWE SUMMERSLAM 2004	PS2/XB/GC	070
WWE THE ROAD TO WRESTLEMANIA	PS2	070
WWE THE BRAVE NEW WORLD	PS2/XB/GC	070
WWE THE STATE COV'DTURE	PS2/XB/GC	070
WWE UNDEFEATED	PS2/XB	070
STAR WARS GALAXY	PC	071
DISGAEA HOUR OF DARKNESS	PS2	071
FREAKY FLYERS	PS2/XB/GC	072
R.N.03	GC	072
DYNASTY WARRIORS 4	XB	073
BILLY HATCHER AND THE GIANT EGG	GC	073
OTOGI: MYTH OF DEMONS	XB	074
THE GREAT ESCAPE	PS2/PC	074
MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR	GC	075
FREEDOM FIGHTERS	PS2	076
SPLASHDOWN: RIDES GONE WILD	PS2/XB/GC	076
GHOST RECON: ISLAND THUNDER	XB	076
BOMBASTIC	PS2	077
GROUP S CHALLENGE	XB	077
BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HAND	GBA	078
FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE	GBA	079
SHINING SOUL	GBA	080
DIGIMON BATTLE SPIRITS 2	GBA	080
HIP SCREEN PAD HARDWARE	GBA	081
GAME BOY PLAYER HARDWARE	GBA	081

HOW WE RATE YOUR GUIDE TO THE GMR SCORING SYSTEM

At GMR, we eat, sleep, and occasionally dream about games. If we say something is a crap sandwich, then don't eat it. If we give it our prestigious Essential Selection award, then you can take it to the bank. Money and time is a waste. Don't hate. Celebrate.

WARNING: WHERE PUBLICATION USES A GRADE RATHER THAN A SCORE, THE GRADE WILL NOT NECESSARILY MEET THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE SCORE.



→ Boost power is the key to success. And fame, glory, riches, women, etc. Use it sparingly, and the pack will fly right by. Too much, and a simple bump in the rump (stop snickering!) will totally end you. Know where the track boosts and recharge areas are on each track. That'll help.



F-ZERO GX

UP TO SPEED

TEEN | GC

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: SEGA
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE: AUGUST 2003
PLAYERS: 1-4
ORIGIN: JAPAN

When Nintendo surrendered its F-Zero franchise to Sega, we thought, "Well, we'd rather not see the company give it up, but at least it's going to Amusement Vision, so there's still hope." Now that we've racked up roughly 300 laps, nine Story mode chapters, four custom vehicles, and a Falcon crashed in a fir tree, "there's still hope" has become "makes total freakin' sense." Proof that we sometimes think too much.

Above all, F-Zero GX is fast. Yes, previous installments have been fast,

but not this fast. Compared with those in N64's *F-Zero X*, GX's backgrounds are composed of much more than colored fog, and this alone enhances the illusion that you're actually racing at 2,300 kilometers per hour. You find yourself rocketing past the giant cargo ships docked in Port Town, the bustling traffic below the tracks of Aeropolis, and the skyscrapers towering above as you ram through the pack of 29 competitors. All this with a framerate that doesn't stutter once. *F-Zero* is finally running on hardware that can do

it proper justice, and Sega makes GameCube sing. There are a few instances of graphical draw-in, most notably with the surrounding foliage of the Green Plant courses, but it doesn't really distract from the action, considering you have about .03 seconds to look up at the pretty trees before crashing into a wall. Yep, fast.

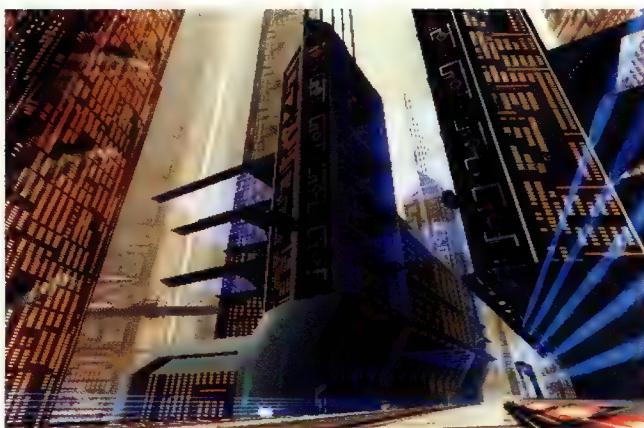
Every race is an exhilarating experience—the top 10 finishers usually place within one second of each other. Only a handful of the 20 standard courses are particularly difficult, but the racer A.I.

2ND OPINION

F-Zero on N64 was a nice-enough game. It looked OK. It played well, and it was fast. But it was visually generic and lacked character. Amusement Vision has dressed *F-Zero* up in a brand-new suit that looks as good as it plays.

—James Melke





→ It's a beautiful screenshot, but when you're going 1,800 kph, it's hard to pick out the finer details of Sega's graphical triumph. Sure, you could stop during a race and have a look around, but then you'd be a big loser.



→ is always on point, keeping pace with you to the very end, especially on the higher-difficulty settings. The learning curve could have been a little friendlier; the transition from Novice to Expert class is especially rough (don't get us started on racing in Master class). But once you learn the tracks, efficient management of your Boost power, and the effectiveness of Attack moves (they work), circuit success is all on you.

Twenty courses, 30 pilots, tight control, and synapse-frying speed would have been enough; these are, after all, the essence of *F-Zero*. But Nintendo and Sega thought these racers of the future had a tale worth telling, so *F-Zero* now has a

Story mode. Composed of nine chapters, the story tells us...something...about Captain Falcon...his competitors...the championship belt...some great evil thing.... Honestly, it doesn't matter. The story is really stupid. The addition of short (and astonishingly difficult) event races is a great idea, but there's no need to subject us to cheesy dialogue ripped directly from a 1980s let's-solve-our-dispute-by-racing flick, even though it matches the soundtrack perfectly (Captain Falcon's theme song is not to be missed).

Personal affinities for mascot-based kart racers aside, it looks like *F-Zero GX* will end up being the best racing game made for GameCube. Sega answered

the call loud and clear—not only has it made the best *F-Zero* game to date, but it's also left us wondering how Nintendo itself could have done any better. That's by no means a slight against previous *F-Zero* games—without that outstanding source material, we'd have just another futuristic racer on our hands. Fortunately, that's not the case. ↗

Andrew Pfister

GMR

SPEED RACER
9/10

BETTER THAN: TUBE SLIDER
FASTER THAN: WIPEOUT FUSION
WAIT FOR IT: UH, EXTREME-G RACING ASSOCIATION

TIME TO PLAY

If there's one thing we don't like about *F-Zero*, it's the totally absurd story they foist upon us. *F-Zero* is a racing game; it doesn't need a story any more than *Gran Turismo*, *Daytona USA*, or *Nickelodeon Presents: Spongebob Squarepants Kart Racing* needs a story. But what's even more upsetting is that according to Nintendo itself, LAN play (à la *Mario Kart: Double Dash* and *Kirby's Air Ride*) was considered and then eventually axed because it wanted *F-Zero GX*'s focus to be on the single-player aspect of the game. Sounds fishy to us, Bob. ↗





→ Lightcycles are the thing everyone seems to remember from the movie. The classic cycles are in the game, but a new upgraded version is seen at left. The lightcycle arenas are scattered throughout the game and are a lot of fun—if you don't mind crashing into walls a few hundred times.



CP-YOU!

Tron's innovative system of character customization adds a good dose of role-playing to the action. You manage various subroutines that represent different weapons, armor, and utilities by hitting F1. Programs are upgraded to beta or gold status, taking up less room on the wheel and improving their effectiveness. You can also upgrade your attributes, such as health, energy and the speed at which you download. 

TRON 2.0

GLOWSTICK NATION

TEEN | PC

PUBLISHER: BUENA VISTA GAMES
DEVELOPER: MONOLITH
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE: AUGUST 2003
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

→ No, Virginia, little glowing men don't live inside your computer—despite what you've heard from early '80s sci-fi cult movies and the games based on them.

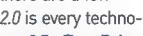
If you're too young to know about *Tron*, or perhaps not enough of a geek, it's a 1982 Disney movie that pioneered computer graphics, and it was one of the first movies to champion videogames as being more complex than just dots on a screen. Now comes *Tron 2.0*, which picks up the *Tron* story 20 years later when your character, the son of the protagonist in the first movie, gets sucked into an evil corporation's mainframe.

Much could have been done with the new story, but much wasn't—it's as

thin as a 5 1/4-inch floppy disk. But that doesn't really matter when you see just how beautifully the world inside the machine is rendered. It's gorgeous and well polished, thanks to the powerful LithTech engine (also seen in *No One Lives Forever*).

Calling *Tron 2.0* a standard first-person shooter would be anomalous. For one, using the ubiquitous disc is a lot different from looking down the barrel of a gun. The embedded subroutine system adds more than just RPG flavor. It's a full-fledged skill system that must be tweaked throughout the game for maximum performance. Gameplay consists of standard puzzles and key hunting, albeit with a convincing

computer-hacking theme. It seems complicated at first, but it's well done.

Tron 2.0 may lack a coherent or interesting story line, but that doesn't mean the game is style over substance. The RPG buried in there is rich (without a bunch of talking to NPCs), and the action is a lot of fun. Oh, and don't forget the lightcycles. Sure, there are a few minor bugs, but *Tron 2.0* is every technofreak's dream come true.  **Tom Price**

GMR

NEW WAVE
8/10

BETTER THAN: *NOLF*
NOT AS GOOD AS: *QUAKE III*
WAIT FOR IT: *CONTRACT J.A.C.K.*

2ND OPINION

Tron 2.0 is one of the most amazing-looking games I've ever seen. Kudos to the designers for pulling off the wild neon visuals. It brings back funky memories of my youth, spent in arcades playing *Discs of Tron*. Those were good times, and these are too.  **James Milne**



HACK//OUTBREAK

MORE FUN IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD

TEEN | PS2

→ At this point, *.hack* either has you or doesn't. If you played through the first two volumes, the story should have its hooks deep enough in you to pull you through the second half of Cyber Connect's epic. If you didn't like them, there's no reason to play part three, which features an essentially unchanged game system and makes no allowances for introducing newcomers to the halfway-complete adventure.

So, there's not much new to say about *OUTBREAK*, save the fact that it's definitely more *.hack*. Its dungeon-hacking gameplay is still frequently tedious, and its difficulty could use some tuning. A random encounter can mean certain death if you happen to lack the elemental spell an enemy is vulnerable to, an issue that's wearing thin after three episodes. It's a raw deal to slog through three or four dungeon levels, only to be killed by a bad roll of the dice. Some of the longer boss encounters are also nastily repetitive, demanding more endurance than strategy.

The difference between this and a genuinely bad RPG is that you want to keep going in spite of such setbacks. *.hack*'s presentation remains endlessly clever, building a plot and character relationships that develop both inside and outside the game-within-a-game. Even when the story isn't moving somewhere interesting, interacting with other players offline has its appeal. There's a weird charm to the conversations, one that goes back and

forth between dungeon crawls, covering subjects from the taste of raw octopus to the films of Akira Kurosawa.

A host of side quests also provides an alternative to the critical missions, filling inevitable stretches of leveling up. The lead role evolves in an interesting way at this point—now that the hero is one of the tougher players on the block, there are fun quests built around helping newer players and even fending off rabid fans. It boils down to a fun ride while it lasts, even if it's not a completely smooth one. And it sets off a suitably apocalyptic conclusion awaits in part four, *QUARANTINE*. **KE**

Dave Smith

PUB: BANDAI
DEV: CYBER CONNECT 2
REL: OCTOBER 2003

PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: JAPAN

GMR

HACKSAW JIM
7/10

BETTER THAN: EVERQUEST ONLINE ADVENTURES
NOT AS GOOD AS: DARK CLOUD 2
WAIT FOR IT: THE REST OF .HACK



ALTER ECHO

THE COLOR PURPLE

TEEN | PS2 (REVIEWED) | XB

→ There's this great warning about the excess of alcohol, and it sums up both a typical freshman year in college and this lilac-hued lump: "I went to bed at 2 with a 10, and woke up at 10 with a 2." *Alter Echo* looks like it should be a fun game, but when you spend some time with it, it makes you want to chew your arm off.

In a nutshell, the game earns two style points for the anime-esque morph suits and enemy designs, and it loses 5 million points for everything else, including horrible collision detection, abrupt difficulty ramps, cheesy dialogue, the Wil Wheaton-look-alike main character, and its prolific use of the color purple.

The game has an irritating tendency to never challenge you—offering one long line of insanely easy puzzles—but it doesn't stop there. It interrupts the action for every puzzle with lengthy cut-scenes explaining how to beat every type of enemy, boss and obstacle. Thanks for the help, *Alter Echo*, cause our brains obviously aren't suited for solving puzzles.

But before any of that takes place, you face the first big tease: You get your morph suits, have them taken away without any real explanation, then have them returned—all within the first hour. The rest of the game is just running, hitting switches, and killing new enemies who have more armor or firepower. What's frustrating is that you never really

utilize your morph forms in boss battles unless the game specifically calls for it. Battles quickly turn linear and repetitive instead of being open-ended, like you would expect from a game that allows you to morph into three forms.

Forget about level-ups—most don't seem worth the trouble of collecting the little green XP balls. Sure, you can punch the ground after powering up, but since the enemies remain just as hard, you never feel like a wicked killing machine. Besides, this effect is all the more difficult when your character looks like the AV kid from high school.

Also, the time-affecting minigame that cues powerful attacks seems like it was added as an afterthought. You'll quickly tire of the click-here-at-the-right-time method, and if that weren't enough, hearing witty adjectives such as "rad," "wicked," "awesome," and "sick" will leave you scrambling for the toilet, just like in college. **KC**

Jason Babler

PUB: THQ
DEV: OUTRAGE GAMES
REL: AVAILABLE NOW

PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

GMR

MUCILAGE
4/10

BETTER THAN: DR. MUTO
AS TEDIOUS AS: BLINK THE TIME SWEEPER
WAIT FOR IT: THE NEW PLAY-DOH BUZZ CUTS SET

CHECK, PLEASE

TAKE OUT YOUR TWO FRONT TEETH AND LET'S DO THIS!

If you're one of those softies who doesn't play sports games, then you're missing out. Hockey games in particular offer some of the fastest, most exciting nonstop action around. Combine that with a high level of reward for skillful play, and you've got yourself a winner. And on this page, we have three solid winners.

NHL 2004

KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES

EVERYONE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB | PC | GBA | PSONE

→ With Sega's *NHL 2K* series (now *ESPN NHL Hockey*) turning up the heat on EA's *NHL* franchise the past couple of seasons, the time was ripe to put hockey magicians Black Box Games (now EA Black Box) on the job and let them have at it. The results are in, and the game is good.

If 2004 were a reality-based TV show, someone would have to file domestic-abuse charges, because the hits come hard and fast—almost too fast. *NHL*

2004 is a checkfest, meaning that when you get the puck, you better pass it fast because you're about to eat wall.

Despite the constant punishment, 2004 is still one of the most technically accurate, strategy-intensive hockey sims around. You never want to fire a pass through traffic or slide that puck across the crease—because you'll pay for it. If only the visual polish matched the immaculate accuracy of the gameplay.  James Mielke



PUB: EA SPORTS	PRICE: \$49.95
DEV: EA BLACK BOX	PLAYERS: 1-8 (W/MULTIPLAYER)
REL: SEPTEMBER 2003	ORIGIN: U.S.A.
GMR	
GRETZKY	
8/10	
BETTER THAN: LAST YEAR'S EDITION NOT AS FUN AS: <i>NHL Hitz Pro</i> WAIT FOR IT: <i>2005</i> TO UP THE ANTE	



PUB: MIDWAY
DEV: NEXT LEVEL GAMES
REL: SEPTEMBER 2003

PRICE: \$39.95
PLAYERS: 1-4 (W/MULTIPLAYER)
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

GMR	LINDROS
8/10	

NOT AS REALISTIC AS: *NHL 2004*
MORE FUN THAN: *NHL 2004*
WAIT FOR IT: THE NY RANGERS TO GEL AS A UNIT

NHL HITZ PRO

MAMA SAID KNOCK YOU OUT

EVERYONE | XB [REVIEWED] | GC | PS2

→ Staking a bid for ice-time credibility, the *NHL Hitz* series ups the head count from the previous game's 3-on-3 format to the ubiquitous 5-on-5 hockey standard while toning down the formerly exploitable on-fire gimmick into short-lived turbo bonuses earned with victories in the occasional fight sequences. Although former ace hockey developer Black Box has hit the high road, you'd never know it, thanks to the fantastic job that newcomer Next Level Games has done with *NHL Hitz Pro*.

With Tim Kitzrow's energetic sure-shot commentary, better-than-*NHL 2004* graphics (particularly in the superior Xbox version), newbie-friendly action (passes are both fast and accurate, skaters accelerate fast), some brilliant hit animations, a great Pickup Game mode, and a surprisingly deep features list, *NHL Hitz Pro* may not be the most realistic hockey simulation this season, but it is the most entertaining. Harder-hitting than the rest.  James Mielke

ESPN NHL HOCKEY

A THREAT TO EA'S DYNASTY

EVERYONE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XB

→ Sega's popular *NHL 2K* series has undergone a name change, but the core gameplay remains as tight as ever. Like a rookie player, this game keeps getting better with age—this year's version features online play, air hockey, and a miniature rink with blazing 2-on-2 action that rivals Midway's *NHL Hitz*, only without the lightning. There's even a full-fledged skills competition with challenges such as penalty shots, skating drills, shot accuracy, and stick handling.

Though ESPN is still inferior on the ice, it crushes *NHL 2003* visually, with graphics and animations that give it an incredible sense of realism. Goalies dive to make a save, players snatch the puck out of the air and kick it, and the glass wobbles if a check is hard enough. Play-by-play commentary is quick and informative, and the stadiums look and sound like their real-life counterparts. Every bit the equal to *NHL 2004*.  Doug Trueman



PUB: SEGA	PRICE: \$49.95
DEV: KUSH GAMES	PLAYERS: 1-4 (1-4 ONLINE)
REL: SEPTEMBER 2003	ORIGIN: U.S.A.
GMR	
HULL	
8/10	
BETTER THAN: <i>NHL 2K3</i> NOT AS GOOD AS: <i>NHL 2003</i> WAIT FOR IT: <i>NHL Rivals 2004</i>	



XB
PC
PS2
GBA

LET'S KICK IT LIVE, ONE TIME...

GMR ROUNDS UP THE BEST OF THE REST OF THIS YEAR'S FOOTBALL GAMES

Last month, *certain* football games weren't ready to be reviewed. This month...they are! It's amazing what a difference 30 extra days makes. In case you haven't already committed to either *Madden* or *ESPN NFL Football*, we present four more targets for a late hit. We blow the whistle on what's worth your time and what's not.

NCAA GAMEBREAKER 2004 JUNIOR DELINQUENTS

EVERYONE | PS2

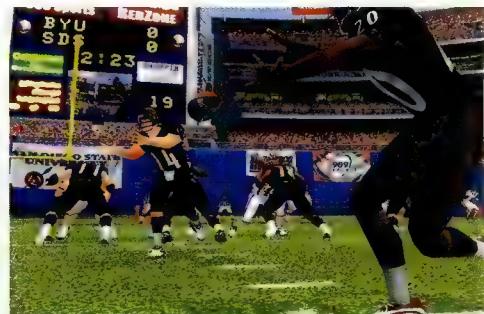
→ The authoritative presence of Hall of Fame sports announcer Keith Jackson significantly enhances what would have been an otherwise poor showing for Sony and 989's *NCAA GameBreaker 2004*, but this college football sim still falls far short of *NCAA Football 2004* in almost every category.

GameBreaker sports a clean look, with players who look appropriately younger and skinnier than their pro counterparts, as well as realistic stadiums and fields. Unfortunately, the pageantry of the college game—drums, sound effects, and cheers—feel so mute and tame that players will feel like they're at a high school game.

The biggest problem by far, however—even more damaging than the

slippery player animations that eliminate that tight feeling of control so critical to digital football—is the fact that, at every difficulty level, you can successfully throw deep fly routes to your receivers eight times out of 10. As far as "magic" plays go, this one's a doozy and pretty much destroys the experience.

It's too bad, because *NCAA GameBreaker 2004* has some interesting features, including a robust set of playbooks that mirror the college game, as well as a Career mode, which allows wannabe Bear Bryants to start a career as a lowly offensive- or defensive coach and move up through the coaching ranks by winning games and recruiting blue-chip high schoolers. **GEORGE JONES**



PUB: SONY
DEV: 989 SPORTS
REL: AUGUST 2003

PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1-2 ONLINE PLAY
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

GMR TRUST FUND 6/10

BETTER THAN: NFL GAME DAY 2004
NOT AS GOOD AS: NCAA FOOTBALL 2004
WAIT FOR IT: NCAA FOOTBALL 2005



PUB: MIDWAY
DEV: MIDWAY
REL: SEPTEMBER 2003

PRICE: \$39.99
PLAYERS: 1-4
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

GMR FACEMASK 8/10

BETTER THAN: NCAA GAMEBREAKER 2003
NOT AS GOOD AS: MADDEN NFL 2003
WAIT FOR IT UNTIL YOU'RE DEAD: A CFL GAME

NFL BLITZ PRO SAME HITS, LESS BLITZ

EVERYONE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XB | GC

→ Midway's *NFL Blitz* series has never taken itself too seriously, which is why it has succeeded against EA's *Madden* juggernaut. *Blitz* has traditionally been about over-the-top, in-your-face football—the kind that lets you cripple an opponent by wrenching his face mask. This same style of gameplay has returned in *NFL Blitz Pro*, as players can again suplex and clothesline one another, generally after the whistle has blown.

Strangely, instead of focusing on the sheer brutality that made *Blitz* a hit in the past, Midway has opted for a more realistic version of football amidst the chaos, and it gives the game an entirely new feel. Teams now face off with 11 players instead of eight, only 10 yards are

needed for a first down, and running plays—which were previously avoided like the plague—are now a staple.

While *NFL Blitz Pro* features a new Franchise mode, roster updates, and the ability to download current weather conditions for the city a game is being played in, few players will bother with these upgrades, at least those wanting pure realism, who will know to seek it elsewhere. Online gameplay is a welcome development, but trash-talking a stranger isn't nearly as satisfying as doing it to a buddy. *NFL Blitz Pro* is a great football title, and fans of the series should check it out. Midway has successfully overhauled this classic series, but it has kept the ultraviolence that made it so popular. **Doug Trueman**

NFL FEVER 2004

FOURTH AND INCHES

EVERYONE | XB

It must be tough to develop a football game. For one, you've got to strike the right balance of realism (for the hardcore fans) and fun (for the billion or so other people who are going to play the game). You've also got to compete with big-name franchises like *Madden*. These pressures may push you to be different and innovative, but different and innovative doesn't necessarily equal good.

NFL Fever 2004 innovates in ways that other football games don't, especially when it comes to the passing game. The new Read and Lead system is as close to a realistic execution of NFL passing as anything yet seen in a videogame. Instead of just mashing a button that corresponds to a receiver, the player has full control over exactly where the ball is thrown and how much is put on it. But the learning curve for using this feature is so incredibly high that it's doubtful that more than a few of the most die-hard fans will ever get the hang of it.

Other aspects of the game aren't at all innovative. The play-calling system is still weak, especially since teams don't have unique playbooks, and there is no challenging a ref's call, as you can in *Madden*. The game also feels rather sluggish; this may be a more accurate representation of real players' speed, but it erodes some of the fun.

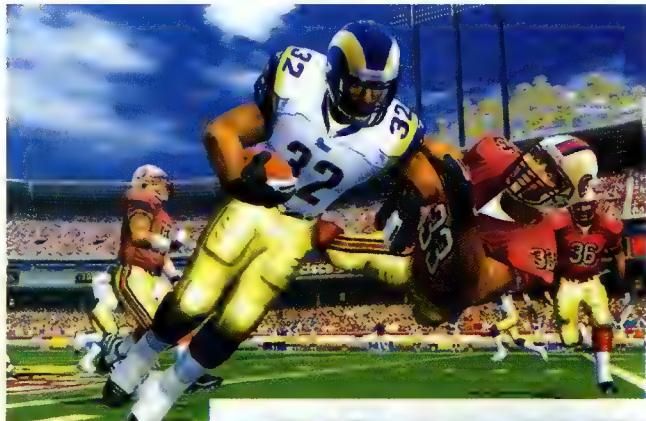
NFL Fever 2004 is an earnest attempt, but it will fall short of the mark for many football fans, despite its Xbox Live support. A little tuning goes a long way, and a recommitment to making the game fun could do wonders. There's always next year. **KE**

Tom Price

PUB MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS PRICE \$49.99
DEV MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS PLAYERS 1-4
REL AUGUST 2003 DUR 10 HRS U.S.A.

GMR SWIM 6/10

BETTER THAN: *NFL GAMEDAY 2004*
NOT AS GOOD AS: *MADDEN 2004*
WAIT FOR IT: *MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL*



NFL GAMEDAY 2004

TIME FOR A HAIL MARY

EVERYONE | PS2

When the most enjoyable moment in a videogame is the video introduction, gamers have a problem. Such is the case with *NFL GameDay 2004*, in which a rousing, gravelly, NFL Films-style introduction immediately gives way to slippery, sloppy, and outdated PS2 football.

The standard features are here—season play, a Franchise mode that casts you as perennial general manager and coach—but this latest version of the once-great *GameDay* fails to address the loosey-goosey control problems and indecipherable defense schemes that have plagued the series for years. What good are new, improved pressure-sensitive controls when the response times of your moves, jukes, and fakes are frustratingly slow?

While a few innovative ideas are here—the ability to quickly audible your running backs into Max Protect and Super Max Protect packages is something *Madden* will surely borrow—football games boil down to two key elements: play-calling and controls.

An improved set of playbooks and defensive variations improve the first half of the equation, but *GameDay* still can't cut it on the field, where—as with NFL Sundays—it's critical to quickly read and react with your quarterback, running back, linebacker, or defensive lineman. It's tough reading wide receivers' breaks out of pass routes, and running backs slip and slide before you get them moving in the right direction. Plus, making defensive plays basically consists of aiming your defensive player in one direction and hoping for the best.

NFL GameDay 2004 places a distant third behind *Madden 2004* and *ESPN NFL 2K4*. **KE** **George Jones**

PUB SONY PRICE \$49.99
DEV 989 SPORTS PLAYERS 1-2, ONLINE PLAY
REL AUGUST 2003 DUR 10 HRS U.S.A.

GMR FUMBLE 4/10

BETTER THAN: *NFL GAMEDAY 2003*
NOT AS GOOD AS: *MADDEN 2004*
WAIT FOR IT: *SEPTEMBER 4 KICKOFF WEEKEND*

XB

PS2



THE SIMPSONS HIT AND RUN

GRAND THEFT AU-D'OH!

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB

Over the past dozen years, game developers have applied a host of gameplay formulas to *The Simpsons*, a TV program that began life as a catchphrase showcase ("Eat my shorts!") et al.) and evolved into the best satire of American culture in the history of the boob tube. *Hit & Run*, by wisely applying the formulas of *Driver* and *Grand Theft Auto*, is easily the best *Simpsons* game ever made because it steals from two of the best games in recent history. (*Hit & Run's* 3D engine also shares the glitchiness of *Driver* and *Grand Theft Auto*, thus demonstrating the difficulty of building a virtual world, whether Vice City or Springfield.)

The indisputable highlight of *Hit & Run* is its hysterical dialogue, voice acted by the show's cast and crafted by the show's writers, but the gameplay doesn't suck by comparison—it's a solid combination of hilarious story missions, street-racing sequences, hidden jokes, and unlockable vehicles and costumes. While most of the mandatory tasks focus on skillful driving, many secondary missions and goals utilize action-platformer elements, including old-school double jumps and coin collecting. Even if you don't possess the encyclopedic *Simpsons* knowledge of most videogame

critics, *Hit & Run* will compel you to play and laugh.

Hit & Run has plenty of love for *Simpsons* fanboys, of course, the most obvious example being the in-game collectible cards; each references one of the show's 300-plus episodes, and includes a capsule description and a line of dialogue. It's the most blatantly self-referential tie-in since the single from the *Bad Boys II* soundtrack with the poignant lyric "Bad Boys II soundtrack!"

Hit & Run's gameplay is entertaining without the license, but the license considerably enhances the fun, and you can't ask for anything more from a tie-in. **TC**

Zach Meston

PUB VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
DEV RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT
REL SEPTEMBER 2003

RATE \$49.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN CANADA

GMR 8/10

BETTER THAN THE SIMPSON ROAD RAGE
NOT AS GOOD AS: EPISODE 9F22, "CAPE FEAR"
WAIT FOR IT: THE SIMPSONS METAL GEAR
SPRINGFIELD



BUFFY: CHAOS BLEEDS STAKE. MEDIUM RARE

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XB | GBA

TC *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a perfect choice for a licensed game since, as explained by series creator Joss Whedon, "Buffy is the sort of person who solves her problems through violence, which is the message I want to send out to the kids."

While *Chaos Bleeds'* fighting system and graphics engine aren't quite as satisfying as the one's in last year's game—the punches and kicks don't have the same oomph—the gameplay is inarguably deeper. *Chaos Bleeds* is packed with gameplay depth, replay value, mordant humor, and vampire killing—the four basic food groups of the videogame diet. **TC** **Zach Meston**



PUB VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
DEV EUROCIM
REL AUGUST 2003

PRICE \$49.99
PLAYERS 1-6
ORIGIN EUROPE

GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN: BTVS: WRATH OF THE DARKFUL KING
NOT AS GOOD AS: SMG'S KISS IN CRUEL INTENTIONS
WAIT FOR IT: THE POTENTIAL BUFFY MOVIE

DISNEY EXTREME SKATE ADVENTURE ON DECK

EVERYONE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB

TC Extremely cute and as extreme as cornmeal, *Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure* could be called *Tony Hawk: The Cartoon Years*. Using Disney characters and *Hawk's* engine, *Adventure* provides the requisite themed levels (Elephant Graveyard and Andy's room), challenges, collecting quests, and secret areas. It's bright and cheery to the point of excess, but no one will be able to fault its trick system or controls. The only knock on the game might be its difficulty. It's a hard world, after all, but the game's target audience (children) might find DESA too tough to master. **TC**

Zach Meston



PUB ACTIVISION
DEV TOYS FOR BOB
REL SEPTEMBER

PRICE \$39.99
PLAYERS 1-2
ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR 8/10

BETTER THAN: SIMPSONS SKATEBOARDING
NOT AS GOOD AS: TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2
WAIT FOR IT: TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND

FUTURAMA BENT OUT OF SHAPE

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XB

TC I really don't want to look for your lost tools, Professor. I want to hear you spout off nonsense about your latest crackpot invention. That's the problem with *Futurama*—the characters are as funny as their TV counterparts, but not funny enough to make you want to endure an uncooperative camera, a choppy framerate, ill-conceived jumping puzzles, terrible aim in the shooting levels, and poor collision detection. The cel-shading looks nice and captures the feel of the TV show, but people who waste great licenses on lazy game design can bite our shiny metal ass. **TC**
Andrew Pfister

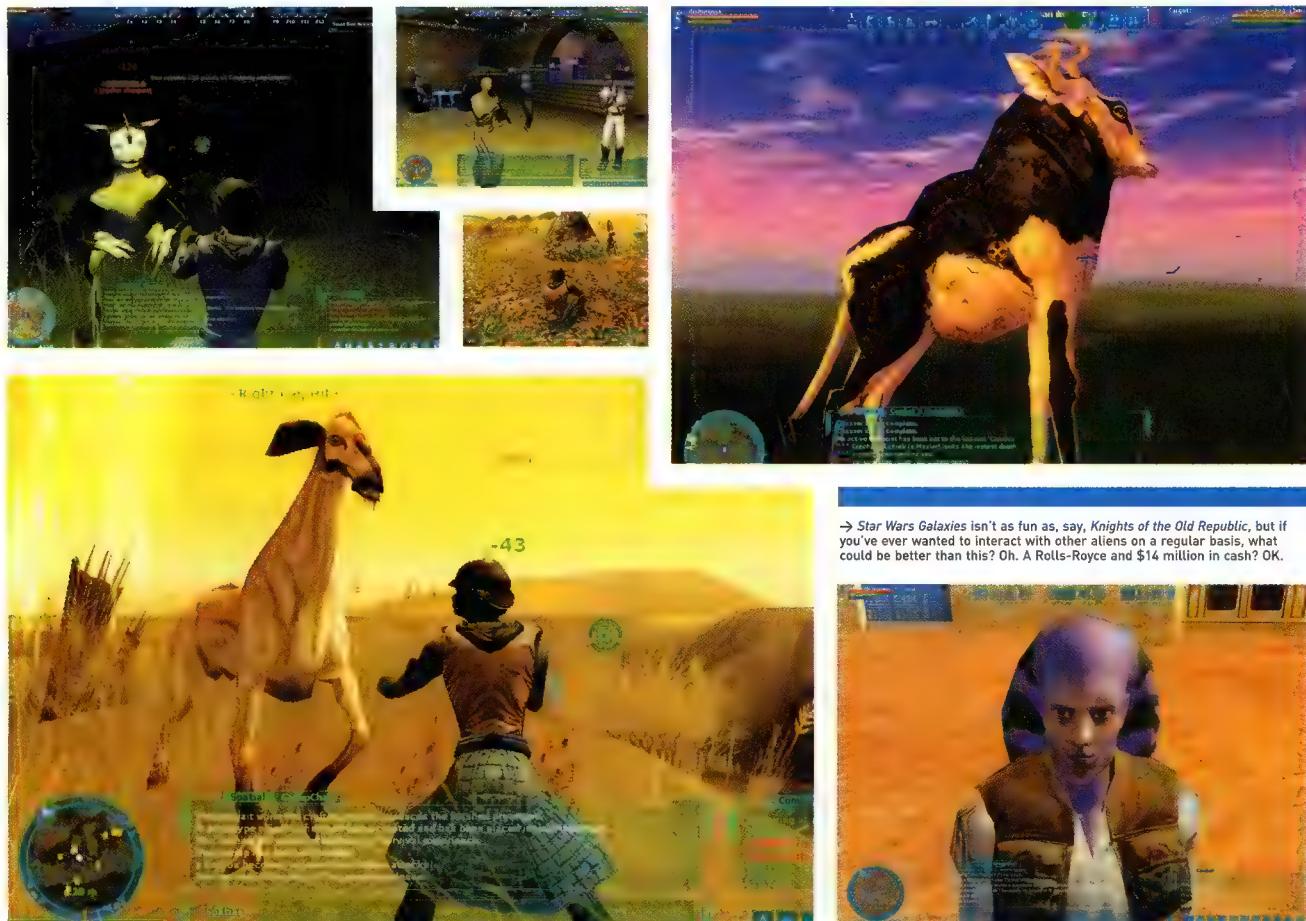


PUB VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
DEV CLIMAX
REL JUNE 2003

PRICE \$49.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR 4/10

BETTER THAN: SIMPSONS SKATEBOARDING
NOT AS GOOD AS: WATCHING FUTURAMA
ON PAR WITH: SIMPSONS WRESTLING



PC

STAR WARS GALAXIES

LAP DANCES OF THE FUTURE AVAILABLE NOW

TEEN | PC

PUBLISHER: LUCASARTS
DEVELOPER: SONY ONLINE
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: MASSIVE MAN
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

→ Don't believe the box—it claims that you can "become one of the ancient and mysterious Jedi." But it's really one of those cheap mind tricks. You may be able to find the supersecret path to Jedi knighthood in this massively multiplayer role playing game, but it's unlikely.

So, what can you do? You can become a cook, a scout, a weaponsmith, a martial artist, a gunslinger, a medic, a dancer, a bounty hunter, a smuggler, or even a homeowner. There are dozens of professions and skills to choose from, and you can combine them in any way you see fit. Just like real life!

Your enjoyment of the game will

be directly proportional to how addictive your personality is. Because there are so many skills to hone, it's easy to get hooked on improving "just one more" facet of your character. You can run out in the wilderness and slay beasts for combat experience or stay in the cantina and dance in your skivvies to entertain the battle weary.

Unfortunately, a few of the skills are fairly boring. And the game's wound system is bafflingly complex, requiring both entertainers and medics for healing. In fact, the whole game is a bit too complex for its own good—the skill system itself might put off those who have never played an MMORPG.

So if you have a jones to live like a virtual Skywalker, and can get over the steep learning curve the game presents, and resign yourself to a fairly equal ratio of adventuring to downtime, *Star Wars Galaxies* can be great. And the fact that you can't just jump in and play as a Jedi isn't too much of a problem—all the cool kids want to be Han Solo anyway. **KE**

Ron Dulin

GMR

CANTINA
7/10
SLIGHTLY BETTER THAN: EVERQUEST
NOT AS GOOD AS: KOTOR (XBOX)
WAIT FOR IT: KOTOR (PC)

2ND. OPINION

Star Wars Galaxies may be a great way to pass the time, but it's more of a lifestyle than a game. I never got into EverQuest, and I ain't getting into SWG until they come up with more-compelling reasons for me to play. Maybe I'm just spoilt by the Jedi-heavy KOTOR.. but can you blame me? **KE**

James Melke

DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS

GRIDLOCK FANTASY

TEEN | PS2

→ *Disgaea* is one of the only meals in town for a PS2-owning strategy fan, but it's the equivalent of an all-you-can-eat buffet and ought to be enough to satisfy even the most ravenous tactical gamer.

If you want a great story in your game, you'll like *Disgaea*. After his father's death, Prince Laharl looks to ascend to the high spot in the Netherworld, but he's saddled with a less-than-desirable set of allies, including a demoness with questionable loyalties, a squad of slacker devil penguins, and an air-headed angel in training who'd rather be a ninja assassin. The voice acting isn't great but the on-target humor and wit in the translation eases the pain.

If you care only about gameplay, *Disgaea* has you covered there, too, with a remarkably deep set of gameplay systems. You can petition a demonic Dark Assembly to change gameplay conditions, recruit any enemy

you defeat in battle and journey into another dimension to strengthen any piece of equipment you carry. Seemingly simple aspects (like the ability to throw allies and enemies across the battlefield and the capacity to switch out party members midbattle) offer more possibilities than the average strategy-RPG.

All of this helps to ensure that *Disgaea* is a strategy-RPG that can compete with the best of them. With all that and big, beautiful 2D character sprites, what's not to love? **KE**

— Nich Maragos

PUB ATLUS
DEV NIPPON ICHI
REL SEPTEMBERPRICE \$49.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN JAPAN**GMR**DEVILISH
8/10BETTER THAN: RING OF RED
ALSO TRY: OKAGE: SHADOW KING
WAIT FOR IT: GLADIUS

Come, now.
We were here to help you in your time of need,
right?



FREAKY FLYERS

FLY AWAY HOME

EVERYONE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB

→ A root canal, a disfiguring car accident, a *Suddenly Susan* marathon—these are things slightly less amusing than *Freaky Flyers*, which foolishly emphasizes characters and 90-plus minutes of execrable FMV clips that miserably fail to invoke the anarchic spirit fueling many of the best cartoons. Midway can deliver big laughs, as evidenced by the *SlugFest* series, but *Freaky Flyers'* attempts at humor are so feeble that you can almost see the flop sweat on the brows of its CG cast. (The game also has horrifically "funny" songs and a narrator you'll want to kill.)

Take away *Freaky Flyers'* humor (please!) and you're left with a decent, challenging kart racer in aerial disguise that's somewhat like the flying sequences in *Diddy Kong Racing*. Overly complicated tracks result in plenty of confusion and frequent framerate stutters; worse, the game tells you the secondary goals of each track only after you've finished a race. Subgoals

are crucial information, since completing them opens up shortcuts and power-up slots, although the standard-issue pickups have little effect on your opponents. In fact, the most enjoyable segments of *Freaky Flyers* are the minigames, which have the clearly defined action that the races lack. Considering its four-year stretch in Development Hell, *Freaky Flyers* turned out better than it could have; however, its ill-conceived characters and so-called comedy dooms it to mediocrity. **KE**

— Zach Meston

PUB MIDWAY
DEV MIDWAY
REL AUGUST 2003PRICE \$49.99
PLAYERS 1-2
ORIGIN U.S.A.**GMR** **5/10**BETTER THAN: SUPER BOMBAD RACING
NOT AS GOOD AS: DIDDY KONG RACING
WAIT FOR IT: MARIO KART DOUBLE DASH!! (GC)

REVIEWS YOU CAN TRUST

pn03 → dynasty warriors 4 → billy hatcher and the giant egg

NOW

P.N.03 DIRTY DANCING

TEEN | GC

► If it were a novel, pretentious intellectual critics would love P.N.03 for its minimalism, defiance of convention, and cryptic title (never explained). So postmodern!

Screw that. As a game, *P.N.03* is boring and repetitive, and it doesn't play to its strengths. Heroine Vanessa Z. Schneider looks great, but the paper-thin story fails to flesh her out. The game squanders a fun time-based combo system by placing enemies too far apart, which often makes connecting one kill to the next impossible. Vanessa's upgradeable battle suits are too similar, and most

players will earn only two or three of the nine available outfits before reaching the final boss. *P.N.03* could have been an intense action-shooter, but Vanessa stops in her tracks to fire, and her sparse repertoire of jumps and dodges feels clumsily staccato. Finally, while enemy robots are well designed, there aren't enough of them: Each type appears again and again, even the bosses!

The best part of the game is when Vanessa flaunts her futuristic T&A as the credits roll. That's right, it's more fun than playing the game. **IC**

Paul Byrnes



POSEUR

4/10

BETTER THAN: A POKE IN THE EYE
NOT AS GOOD AS: SPACE CHANNEL 5
WAIT FOR IT: P.N.04

TEEN | GC

PRICE: \$39.99

PLAYERS: 1

ORIGIN: JAPAN

DEV: CAPCOM

PUB: CAPCOM

REL: AVAILABLE NOW

XB

PS2

GC

WII

Dreamcast

PC

XB

PS2



OTOGI: MYTH OF DEMONS POETRY IN MOTION

TEEN | XB

Once upon a time, action was pretty much the only (video) game in town. Enemy A.I. was nonexistent (bad guys—they were always bad—simply came at you, ready to kill or be killed), there were no persistent worlds, and no stealth missions, only levels to be passed, enemies to be trounced, and decor to be decimated. Sega's *Otogi* unabashedly fits this narrow definition, but its gameplay and graphics bring a richness to the genre in grand style and with lyrical grace.

Aided by a stable camera, a simple yet effective control scheme, and more than 30 elaborately monikered weapons (such as the Locust's Wing and the Heretic's Blade), silent hero Raikoh looks as at ease darting gracefully through bamboo thickets and lava-strewn caverns as he does carving swaths through the game's elaborately detailed landscape. When it comes to dealing demon death with finesse, the laconic Raikoh could well give *Devil May Cry's* wisecracking Dante a real run for his money—Raikoh

doesn't need to spout off one-liners when dispatching the game's impressive array of monsters. Inspired by Japanese myth, each beastie is given its own gorgeously gruesome aesthetic. Similarly, *Otogi*'s 25-plus stages are psychedelically imaginative and proffer up an astounding amount of scenery for Raikoh to raze; demolition experts can even opt to return to cleared levels to finish off their work and sniff out secrets.

Is all of this reason enough to go out and get an Xbox? Graphical splendor aside, we'd have to say no: It's one hell of an action title and a near-perfect merger of style and substance, but we'd be hard-pressed to confirm it as a classic. In this post-GTA, post-Halo, post-MGS world, its hack-n-slash simplicity comes off as being a wee bit unambitious. That said, for what it's worth, *Otogi* plays great and looks amazing, and that's more than you—or we—can say about most of the alternatives. **IE**

—David Chen



PUB: SEGA
DEV: FROM SOFTWARE
REL: AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE: \$39.99
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: JAPAN

GMR FLUID 8/10

BETTER THAN: SHINOBI
1,000 TIMES PRETTIER THAN: TENCHU
WAIT FOR IT: NINJA GAIDEN



THE GREAT ESCAPE MORE FUN THAN PRISON, BUT NOT MUCH

TEEN | XBOX [REVIEWED] | PC | PS2

When CD-based games first came into vogue, some developers got the idea to make them like movies. Their method, essentially, was to make a film—a bad one usually starring Tia Carrere—and then graft gameplay onto it in the form of simple puzzles and minigames. All these titles bombed, their developers were never heard from again, and the phenomenon is now regarded as an embarrassment to the industry and the medium.

Now, new developers are again trying this tactic. Their efforts have yielded games like *The Great Escape*, and their fates will likely be similar. *The Great Escape* claims to be a stealth-action game based on the classic WWII prison-camp film, but it's really an heir to those old interactive movies—heavy on the movie, light on the meaningful interaction.

This game has the advantage of starring Steve McQueen instead of Tia Carrere, but it has many disadvantages that balance this out, including unresponsive controls, repetitive scenario design, and inconsistent A.I. The tasks boil down to schlepping from point A to point B, and the game's attempts to encourage stealth really demand only simple trial and error. The tools available for anticipating and outwitting the opposition are painfully clumsy—to say nothing of

the laughable combat controls—and the guards behave almost randomly, unlike *Metal Gear*'s well-programmed opposition.

The cinematic portion of the game, however, does justice to the film. The voice acting is good, the soundtrack is classic, and the extra scenarios flesh out the different characters' backstories. But when *The Great Escape* attempts to be a game, the results are so slipshod, so obviously meant to sew the cinematic elements together, its appeal is very limited. Once you start this game, like any prisoner of war, you'll quickly find yourself wanting to get out. **IE**

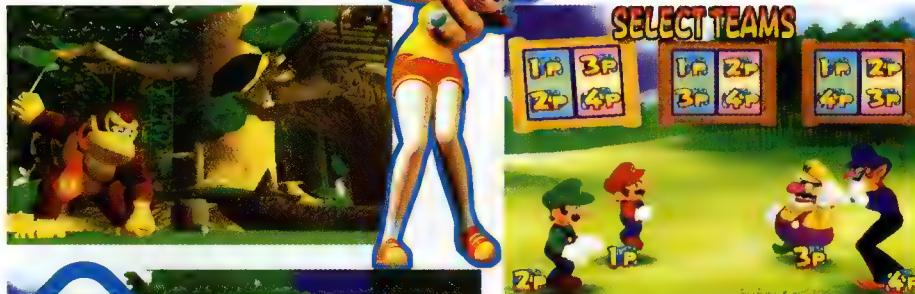
—Dave Smith

PUB: GOTHAM GAMES
DEV: PIVOTAL
REL: AVAILABLE NOWPRICE: \$39.99
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: U.K.

GMR LEMME OUT 4/10

BETTER THAN: HOGAN'S HEROES RERUNS
NOT AS GOOD AS: SPLINTER CELL
ON PAR WITH: THE SPECIAL-EDITION DVD





MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR

GO-AH INNA DA HOLE!

EVERYONE | GC

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE: JULY 2003
PLAYERS: 1-4
ORIGIN: JAPAN

→ *Toadstool Tour* is an appropriate subtitle for Mario's golfing debut on GameCube. It references not only the familiar Mushroom Kingdom-themed courses, but also the game's tripped-out visual presentation—Nintendo, game developer for kids and self-medicated college students everywhere.

Beyond the sugary eye candy, which is as bright and colorful as a Skittles commercial, a seriously good and challenging golf game lies at the heart of *Toadstool Tour*. It harkens back to the days of timed button clicks on a power meter, not all this namby-pamby joystick tru-swing junk so-called serious golf videogames are using to dumb-down their products. In addition

to the sweetly traditional controls, a whole host of minigames adds to the replayability while helping you brush up on elements of your game. As you play, the game becomes more and more challenging, forcing you to consider the finer intricacies of ball physics as greens become smaller and more treacherous. Never, though, does the game become frustrating.

The new Mushroom Kingdom courses are a hoot, full of warp pipes that are so tempting to aim for but so damn hard to hit. Creative hazards like Piranha Plants, Chain Chomps, and Thwomps make for fun visuals but will drive you nuts if they catch you. The Mario flavor is so infused in these

courses, they seem almost like levels in a traditional *Mario* platformer.

Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour practically begs to be played with other people. Up to four can play at once, and the experience of playing with another person, challenging each other to make that risky shot or laughing at your opponent's misfortunes with the hazards, is where the true joy of this game comes from. **→ Tom Price**

GMR BALLS/Y¹⁰
BETTER THAN: HOT SHOTS GOLF 2
NOT AS GOOD AS: MARIO TENNIS
WAIT FOR IT: MARIO GOLF ADVANCE TOUR (GBA)

2ND. OPINION

As someone who has little to no interest in videogames about golf, *Toadstool Tour* does a good job of making me pick up the controller now and then. Whether it's the pretty graphics, simple play mechanics, or the fact that it's somewhat relaxing, I'll never know, and I prefer to keep it that way. **→ James Meleke**



TIME TO PLAY

GameCube-Game Boy Advance connectivity is one advantage Nintendo can exploit like no one else. The upcoming *Mario Golf: Advance Tour* will offer that connectivity, giving fans the chance to transfer characters back and forth between *Advance Tour* and *Toadstool Tour*. Now, you can take your golfers on the road and work on your slice from the comfort of your desk. **→**



FREEDOM FIGHTERS GOES GREAT WITH FREEDOM FRIES

EVERYONE | XB [REVIEWED] | GC | PS2 | PC

When godless Soviets drop the vodka bottle of oppression on New York City, plumber-turned-hero Christopher Stone must set things right. As a leader of an anti-Communist squad, Stone uses the sewers as a base from which to free the Big Apple.

Once this half-intriguing/half-cornball plot is established, *Freedom Fighters* leaps off as a competent third-person shooter. Players are tasked with rescuing hostages, blowing stuff up, and raising Old Glory over selected buildings. As Stone performs his deeds, he gains charisma and can begin forming an army of up to 12 fighters, which is where *Fighters* truly shows its mettle.

Gameplay buttons are used to give commands to Stone's brigade. Squad members (singly or as a group) can hold a position to allow their leader to perform a flanking move, storm a position in force, or be recalled to Stone's location. The controls, which utilize button taps and

holds, are simple and easy to master; they allow the player to concentrate on strategy without worrying about issuing the wrong command. In gameplay, this strategic element is a godsend, providing plenty of ways by which a player can tackle fortified enemy positions.

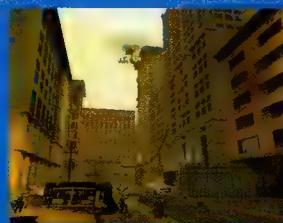
Fighters plays up the action while satirizing its story with cookie-cutter bad guys, bad accents, and jingoistic sentiments. There are some A.I. issues, but otherwise this game is as solid as the Iron Curtain. Pre-fall, of course. **—Greg Orlando**

PUB: ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEV: IO INTERACTIVE
REL: AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

GMR

7/10

BETTER THAN: COMMANDOS 2
WORSE THAN: MAX PAYNE
WAIT FOR IT: ADVENT RISING



SPLASHDOWN: RIDES GONE WILD IF DISNEYLAND FELL INTO THE SEA

EVERYONE | PS2

THQ's latest entry into the world of personal-watercraft racing is a mixed bag. It has well-designed animated courses, a great sense of speed, tight control, and over 75 tricks you can perform. It also has a rather annoying trick control scheme and (including unavoidable autosaves) load times for new courses that average a minute and 15 seconds.

Gameplay is quick and simple: Players tear around tracks that seem to be from theme parks gone berserk. A trip through Venetian-style canals features James Bond-esque car, helicopter, and boat chases, complete with shootouts. A race through a flooded city forces players to launch their boats through football goalposts and dash through the halls of a high school.

Speed comes from earning trick points, but only certain moves can be chained together. The Training mode teaches players the correct sequence of button presses, but there isn't an in-race Pause menu that lists the various combinations, nor is there one in the

manual. Hardcore players will memorize every move, but simply holding a Trick button and spinning the joystick is almost as effective. A solid title, but not what it could have been. **—Doug Trueman**

PUB: THQ
DEV: RAINBOW STUDIOS
REL: AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE: \$39.99
PLAYERS: 1-2
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

GMR

7/10

BETTER THAN: WAVE RALLY
NOT AS GOOD AS: WAVE RACE BLUE STORM
WAIT FOR IT: SSX 3



HOST RECON: ISLAND THUNDER

GET ONLINE OR GET OUT

MATURE | XB

Play through the brief single-player campaign of this Recon re-tread (*Thunder*'s eight new solo levels were originally created as an expansion pack for the PC version), and you'll be left wondering just what in the hell ever made this series so damn popular. Even if ordering around and leveling up your A.I. squad lends some interesting strategy, the dated, blocky graphics; simple mission objectives; and all-around average gameplay hardly help Recon stand

out among Xbox's many first-person shooters. But jump online, and you'll immediately reconsider *Thunder*. The ambush point and hiding-spot-filled battlefields (including five new maps for *Thunder*), together with Xbox Live's voice-chat ability, make for exciting teamwork possibilities in the game's many multiplayer modes. Not worth \$40 if you already shelled out for the original, but good (if not great) for online newcomers. **—Mark MacDonald**

PUB: UBISOFT
DEV: RED STORM
REL: AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE: \$39.99
PLAYERS: 1-2/2-16 ONLINE
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

GMR

7/10

BETTER THAN: UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP
NOT AS GOOD AS: RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN
WAIT FOR IT: RAINBOW SIX 3



BOMBASTIC

LIKE YAHTZEE... FROM HELL!

EVERYONE | PS2

→ At first blast, explosion-rocked puzzler *Bombastic* seems custom-made for kindergarten-aged Satan worshippers with a serious Jones for low-grade arithmetic. After all, its core fun-with-numbers concept is barely different than that of 1998's PlayStation 1 prequel *Devil Dice*, which itself was begat by math geeks who won a homebrew game-design contest in Japan. But even if you've never heard of *Devil Dice* and don't give *Bombastic* a wee devil's chance in hell (half) of achieving mainstream detonation, don't piss on this game's fuse and walk away. It's surprisingly addictive and really does make math fun. No, really!

The formula is fairly simple: One or two players land up to five if you jack in a Multitap for the not-quite-thrilling Wars model shimmy darling little devils—with an off-the-charts cuteness quotient!—across a game board in order to roll together dice so they have the same face value. Matching the correct number of same-faced dice makes them go kaboom, blasting any nearby die that is one digit lower, triggering other nearby dice, and so on in true combo-crazy-puzzle-game fashion! An explosion-free Original mode is available for the faint of heart. Mastering the basics takes only a few tries.

Players who get off on subjecting sickeningly cute animal critters to

horrible fiery deaths can jaunt through the Quest mode, which aside from wasting five or so hours with simple puzzles and boss battles, will actually improve your dice-blasting skills in the main single- and multiplayer games. That's how you'll spend most of *Bombastic*, anyway: steely eyed, laying down triple-digit combos with a pal (you can either compete or cooperate), getting into a zone that lasts hours, and chanting "Devil Babies are GO!" 

Crispin Boyer

PUB: CAPCOM	PRICE: \$29.99
DEV: SHIFT	PLAYERS: 1-2 (2-5 W/MULTITAP)
REL: AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN: JAPAN

GMR SNAKE EYES 8/10

BETTER THAN: TETRIS WORLDS
NOT AS COMPLEX AS: LINEAR ALGEBRA
ON PAR WITH: FANTAVISION



GROUP S CHALLENGE

MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

EVERYONE | XB

→ With quality games like *Midnight Club II* and *Midtown Madness 3* recently gracing Microsoft's big black box, digital speed demons have plenty of reasons to strap on those goofy leather driving gloves. Why someone would part with his hard-earned dollars for this mediocre effort is a mystery.

Group S starts out so strong, too. A bunch of real-world racing locations and a handful of licensed cars immediately set it apart from the aforementioned competition. But as soon as you take to the track, things fall apart. Your competitors are completely brain-dead, and driving into a turn when a few cars are onscreen is truly a sight to see. You'll wonder if your Xbox is broken when you see the insane amount of slowdown *Group S* suffers as the pack kicks up some smoke when the cars jam on the brakes. Absolutely sickening.

But the most unforgivable transgression is the total lack of online play. What the heck? Is this not the system that sports the best online setup? If you could hook up with *Group S*, you could at least forgive the crappy competition in the single-player game. Besides, the car handling really isn't all that bad. In fact, it's the high point of the entire package. It's too bad the single-player game is so short and boring.

Yes, *Group S* attempts the whole *Project Gotham/Gran Turismo* car-collection thing, but it takes a strange

approach to the concept. In order to fill your garage, you need to play through the brief Championship mode again and again. And serious gearheads won't go for the half-assed part swapping and upgrading available for each car.

The graphics seal the deal. This just doesn't look like an Xbox game. The slowdown notwithstanding, the lighting is bad, the car models look wrong, and the trackside objects are sparse and ugly. With hot games from Rockstar and Microsoft still so fresh, bothering with something as lackluster as *Group S Challenge* would just be spinning your wheels. 

GMR SLOW LANE 5/10

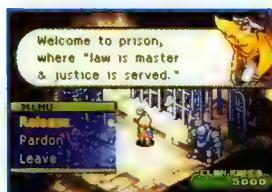
PUB: CAPCOM	PRICE: \$39.99
DEV: CAPCOM	PLAYERS: 1-2
REL: AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN: JAPAN

BETTER THAN: MERCEDES-BENZ WORLD RACING
NOT AS GOOD AS: SEGA GT
WAIT FOR IT: PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2



XB

PS2



GBA REVIEW

BETWEEN SOLAR PANELS AND TINY PEOPLE FIGHTING TINY WARS, WE'VE HAD OUR WORK CUT OUT FOR US THIS MONTH

BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HAND

LIGHT IT UP

EVERYONE | GBA

→ More *Spirited Away* than *Snatchers*, Hideo Kojima's imaginatively whimsical *Boktai* is a GBA gem. That said, just as some gamers won't ever wet themselves over "tactical espionage action," some won't dig on *Boktai*'s biggest bullet point, which is just the thing that makes it so totally unique: a solar sensor built in to the cart.

By directly affecting hero Django's vim and vigor—not to mention that of his sun-fearing foes—what could have been a gimmick makes *Boktai*'s day/light motif much more than skin deep. If may sound tedious, but Kojima and Company have prudently opted not to make this aspect too much of a burden on the player. While there are certainly aspects of the game (such as battling bosses at the sun-channeling Pile Driver) that absolutely necessitate catching some rays, much of it can be navigated with a bit of craftiness.

It comes as no surprise, then, that—similar to Solid Snake's seminal exploits—much of the pleasure to be taken from *Boktai* is

proportional to the effort you're willing to put forth. Playing patiently and avoiding contact with most of the cute-as-a-cartoon dungeon dwellers makes the going smoother and quicker, earning players better marks at each mission's end.

Boktai finely fuses the action with the role-playing, so it's well suited to fans in either camp. When, by choice or circumstance, combat is unavoidable, it rarely proves too taxing; similarly, exploration rarely gets tedious. Tinkerers will enjoy collecting rare items, mix-n-matching gun parts, and popping mushrooms. And early on in the game, Django learns how to cross-breed various collected fruits to produce helpful items.

Those of you with time to spend in the sun will find plenty to savor in this charming cart, but be prepared: By its very nature, this inimitable epic unfolds at its own pace. And be sure to heed the game's exhaustively thorough instruction manual: Don't play in the sun for too long. No one likes a red neck. ←

—David Chen



→ With crisp, colorful graphics and an impressive soundtrack, *Boktai* goes great with the GBA Player, which delivers something that's likely close to what the game looked like in development. This is a Hideo Kojima game, so the impressively complex (for GBA, anyway) eight-way controls feel pretty snappy, and it's (still!) one of the few games we know of that makes pressing up to and sidling against the wall so damn simple. Put another way: This game bodes really freaking well for those hoping to spy some Snake on the GBA.



PUB	KONAMI	PRICE	\$29.99
DEV	KCEI	PLAYERS	1
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	JAPAN

GMR 8/10

BETTER THAN: BURNED RETINAS
AS GOOD AS: CASTLEVANIA ON THE GBA
WAIT FOR IT: SOLARBABIES: THE GAME

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE

LOVE IS A BATTLEFIELD

EVERYONE | GBA

→ The closest a videogame can come to being chesslike without actually being chess is to be a strategy-RPG—the type of game in which one moves little men around a little battlefield upon the surface of which little battles take place. The genre has been defined over the years by such classics as *Ogre Battle*, *Tactics Ogre*, *Shining Force*, and, more recently, the *Front Mission* series. When Square finally decided to get in on the act, success was practically ensured by the not-so-subtle application of the *Final Fantasy* brand (along with acquisition of a large portion of Quest, the *Tactics Ogre* development team), resulting in the timeless *Final Fantasy Tactics*.

Six dreadfully long years have passed, during which time Square simply bought Quest (as well as the *Tactics Ogre* franchise), and now, junior tacticians can finally put their copies of *Advance Wars* to rest and get on with it in *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*.

In keeping with the *Final Fantasy* mantra, *Tactics Advance* has nothing to do with the story previously told on PlayStation. Instead, the story focuses on a small group of friends, each of whom commands a different place in their real-world schoolyard society. We say "real world" because before long, you're thrust into a world of psychological trauma spun by your overactive imagination. It's your job as the hero to work with a random assemblage of trusty allies and make your way back to reality—and this is where the meat of the gameplay comes in.

Final Fantasy Tactics Advance basically consists of moving your soldiers around a square map on which elevation and location determine your chances of a successful attack. If you've played a *Tactics* game, you know exactly what to expect. But *Tactics Advance* mixes things up by adding a new law system: Every battle has a preset restriction on certain moves or

spells you aren't allowed to use, making each battle a new challenge—and battles are abundant in supply. While you're tackling missions of your choosing, you may also send single members of your clan off on solo missions, which have the auxiliary benefit of raising both the assignee's and your clan's overall experience.

The job system is as versatile and diverse as ever, requiring you to learn a set number of skills and techniques before you're allowed to master another job class. As you go, you unlock more-exotic hidden job classes [such as dragon knight, alchemist, and gunner]. If you're in no hurry to plow your way through to the ending, you can easily play for more than 60 fantastic hours of strategy gaming. You can even replay previously completed missions if it strikes your fancy.

The graphics are as detailed as you'd ever expect to see on GBA, and in some ways, they look even better than those of the original PlayStation *Tactics*. The only drawbacks to this game are an unwieldy menu system that makes it hard to manage characters and their equipment, and the tendency for the battlefield to become cluttered when too many characters bunch up in the same area. Although the presence of a chocobo-mounted onscreen judge does his best to clear fallen soldiers out of the way, even he sometimes gets in the way. The orchestral soundtrack makes the most of GBA's limited sound capabilities and makes for great listening, provided you're using the headphone adapter.

For a game so rich in tactical challenges and opportunities, it's no understatement to say that a title of this caliber doesn't come around often enough. If you're looking for a great RPG strong on replay value (the item trading and link-up systems are particularly handy) with great visuals and art style to match (Akihiko

Yoshida's character designs have never been better), there's no need to look further than *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*. Once you put it in your GBA, we guarantee it'll be quite some time before you take it out. **KE**

—James Mielke

PUB NINTENDO DEV SQUARE ENIX TECHNICAL PRICE \$34.99
REL SEPTEMBER 2003 PLAYERS 1-2 ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR ROLLICKING 9/10

BETTER THAN: *FINAL FANTASY TACTICS* (PS1)
NOT AS GOOD AS: *SHINING FORCE III* (SS)
ALSO TRY: *DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS*



→ One irritating thing about *FFTA*'s percentage-reliant battle system is that you'll only land about 40 percent of the hits you had an 80 percent chance to make. Ironically, the CPU always seems to land 80 percent of its 40-percent-chance attempts. If you ask us, that's freshly bottled cheapass.



SHINING SOUL

PACK YOUR BAGS AND GO!

EVERYONE | GBA

→ No one in their right mind would expect an action-RPG of the *Diablo* mold on a handheld system like Game Boy Advance. But Sega and Atlus are prepared to shatter your nearsightedness with a game that achieves portable *Diablo*-ness like no one's business. So if you've ever wanted to dungeon-crawl on the go, now's your chance.

Depending on what sort of character type you like to play as (fast but weak, strong but slow, somewhere in the middle), *Shining Soul* has you sorted. Whether you choose from the physically weak/magically strong wizard class, the bulky-n-brutal dragonute class, the balanced warrior type, or the very Link-ish (à la *Zelda*) archer class, everyone should be able to find a style they're comfortable with. Since each class offers a tangibly different play experience, replay

value is all but assured for gamers willing to give the extra classes a try.

Gameplay consists primarily of wandering through a fixed set of environments, each multiple levels deep, while hacking away at the enemies who rush you relentlessly. Along the way, you can pick up items dropped by the enemies or resting in treasure chests. If what you find lying around isn't useful, you can buy items, armor, and weapons, or you can craft unique items forged from rare materials at various shops in town. Wash, rinse, and repeat your way through each level, fight the requisite boss, and move on to the next area.

The main problem with *Shining Soul* is that it quickly gets repetitive and is best played with the three friends that the game supports. After all, it's no fun traveling solo. **←**

— James Mielke



→ The game is fun but benefits from the addition of friends, who make it easier to tackle the flood of monsters you meet.

PUB ATLUS
DEV SEGA OF JAPAN
REL SEPTEMBER 2003

PRICE \$29.99
PLAYERS 1-4 (w/Link Cable)
ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR

GET SOME!
7/10

BETTER THAN: GAUNTLET
NOT AS GOOD AS: GOLDEN SUN
WAIT FOR IT: SHINING SOUL 2



DIGIMON BATTLE SPIRITS 2

SMASH BROS. IT AINT'

EVERYONE | GBA

→ Bandai has used its stable of not-as-popular-as-Pokémon characters to create a *Super Smash Bros.*-style game for Game Boy Advance. While *Digimon Battle Spirits 2* does an admirable job of capturing the platform jumping and heated brawling of Nintendo's more famous franchise, the game still falls flat.

DBS2 provides a decent selection of Digimon to choose from (most are derived from the humanoid types), but it's hardly equal to the depth and variety of the *Smash Bros.* games. Although that's acceptable, given the cartridge-based nature of the game, it doesn't change the fact that most of the characters play very similarly and that their respective lists of moves are pretty shallow. This results in a tedious button-mashing fiesta that gets old by the third match. Think *Street Fighter* minus 98 percent of its moves and you've got a decent idea of

how deep *DBS2*'s fighting engine isn't.

Another frustration is in the game's orb system. By striking your enemy, you cause orbs of various denominations to erupt from their body; likewise, you spew gems when hit. The character with the most points at the end of the time limit wins the match, but since the hits come as cheaply as they're delivered, it's less fun than it sounds. Even for the target audience, this game is hard to recommend. **←**

— James Mielke

PUB BANDAI
DEV DAIMPS
REL SEPTEMBER 2003

PRICE \$29.99
PLAYERS 1-2
ORIGIN JAPAN

SEE-SAW
4/10

BETTER THAN: A FRIENDLESS CHILDHOOD
NOT AS GOOD AS: STREET FIGHTER II
WAIT FOR IT: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



→ It's a simple fighting game, with platforms to jump on and Digimon. What more could you ask for? Good gameplay? Oh.



HARDWARE

AFTER ALL, IT'S NOT WHAT YOU PLAY, IT'S HOW YOU PLAY IT

HIP SCREEN PAD ROBOT ARMS NOT INCLUDED

PS2 | Xbox | GC

→ The No. 1 rule in peripheral design (and if it isn't, it should be) is that if you plan to add robot arms or anything else to a controller, then the controller itself had better be worth owning. But far too often, that isn't the case, and the Hip Screen Pad from Hip Interactive is the latest example of a good idea being attached to a mediocre controller.

The Pad is, to put it simply, a DualShock wannabe topped with a monitor on which you can watch DVDs or play games without a television. The controller is roughly the same size as a DualShock, and its buttons are in the same positions as those on the DualShock, but the Hip Screen Pad's face buttons and D-pad are too stiff to provide the precise control most games require. The extra-violent

rumble feature is frightening enough to warrant not even using it.

It's a shame, really, because the 2.6-inch monitor is truly a sight to behold. For such a small screen, it produces a surprisingly sharp and clear picture that makes it easy to see just about anything you throw at it. RPGs suffer a bit because of all of the text, but every other genre looks great.

In the end, the Hip Screen Pad is useful only in the rarest of circumstances—like at a cheap motel where the television has no inputs. It would have made more sense if it were a clip-on unit to the original DualShock. Yes, the screen is nice, but the lack of practicality and high price make it tough for us to get excited about the Hip Screen Pad. **KE**

Eric Qualls



GMR

PERIPHERAL
MANUFACTURER
INTERACTIVE

TEENY TEEVEE
6 /10



GAME BOY PLAYER DOES WHAT IT'S TOLD

GC | GBA

→ Depending on how you look at it, the Game Boy Player is either incredibly useful or incredibly useless. On one hand, you can now enjoy GBA for GBC, or just plain old GBA games on a big, bright, clear screen. On the other, you're removing the portable element from portable gaming.

If you prefer the former, you're in for a treat, because the GB Player does exactly what it says and it does it well. Although you're limited to playing within a border, you can increase the size of the playing area at the expense of a sharp image. Additional options include adjustable controls and the ever-popular selection of borders. Another good feature is the ability to hook up a GBA to use as a controller. It's a nice touch and a rare one, because while the GB Player covers the basics, it offers precious little else.

Given Nintendo's desire to shove

GameCube-to-GBA connectivity down our throats, it's odd that the GB Player proves utterly useless for that purpose...unless you have two televisions and two GameCubes in close proximity. And if you were hoping to take advantage of a television for splitscreen multiplayer gaming, you're out of luck. There are no extra tricks or features here.

Aesthetically speaking, the unit is plain but inoffensive: an inch-thick slab of plastic that only comes in black. It's not as bad as it might seem—black goes well with purple and platinum—but it's still disappointing, given all the colors available in Japan.

Although the GB Player obviously loses out on the portability factor, it's the best option for playing GBA games at home. Just don't expect anything else from it. **KE**

Ravi Hiranand

GMR

PERIPHERAL
MANUFACTURER
INTERACTIVE

DOES THE JOB
7 /10

81

MORE

TIPS, CODES, MOVIES,
AND MORE



THIS MONTH IN MORE

F-ZERO GX 083

→ You got a problem with me? Let's race!

TOP 10 TIPS: AI 086

→ Between good and evil...endings

SCREEN 088

→ We confess, we love animated-comedy box sets

RETROACTIVE 090

→ We had a dream last night...

THE LIST 092

→ Games for sale! Get your games here!

GAME GEEZER 098

→ Two words: Pocket, Geezer.

F-ZERO GX

RACING FOR THE PRIZE

SO, YOU WANT TO BE A PILOT FROM THE FUTURE?

→ *F-Zero* is a surprisingly tough game. The Novice and Standard classes aren't that bad, but you'd better be ready for the jump to Expert. The following is a guide to the sights and sounds of Port Town, Mute City, and Aeropolis. Buckle up and enjoy the ride, just don't stick your head out the window....

FIRST PLACE, IN YO' FACE!

There's a lot of depth to *F-Zero GX*, but we'll start off with some basic pointers:

Use your boost intelligently. On the first lap, make sure you hit every yellow zipper to stay with the pack, then boost as soon as lap 2 begins. Never waste a boost directly before or after hitting a zip line; it's better to space them out in order to sustain maximum speed. Always be aware of where the energy recharge strips are for each track. Some tracks have multiple strips spaced out, but others have only one at the end. Use too much power right away and you could be hurtin' when crunch time rolls around. But you can't be too conservative with it, either, lest you fall behind the pace and end up in 19th place—that's not going to win you any cups. And never ever boost when you're near the top of an incline. We learned that the hard way.

Be comfortable with your craft. It's ultimately a matter of preference, but we recommend always setting the slider toward maximum speed. Once you get comfortable with how your craft handles, you'll spend less time running into walls and more time barreling down straightaways. Pay attention to the Body, Boost, and Grip ratings when selecting a ship, as well as the ship's weight.



MASTER YOUR DOMAIN

By winning all three cups on Expert difficulty, you'll open up the dreaded Master class, where there is no margin for error....

The A.I. is brutal. It knows exactly where and when to boost, and it almost always hits the zip strips. **You're expected to do the same** if you want to stay with the pack. You cannot win the Master class cups without flawless boost management. **Be aggressive.** B-E-A-G-G...you know the cheer. Nobody has boost power on the first lap, so it's the perfect opportunity to hunt down your rivals—they can't get points if they're dead. **You get only two ships for the entire cup**, so make 'em last. Use the Practice mode to learn the tracks; you can add in A.I. racers and increase their skill level to Master. If at first you don't succeed, **try another 200 times**.



PRESENTING...THE HOMER!

What, 30 cars isn't enough for you? Then make your own! We'd like to see you try....

You can design your own car by finishing first in a Grand Prix, then using the tickets to purchase parts in the F-Zero shop. Combine a cockpit, body, and booster, then pick a color and design your own emblem to top it off. But be careful, each part has its own attributes (body, boost, grip), and they all differ in weight. You could end up designing the best-looking ship in the galaxy, but it'll slide off the track in the first three seconds of the race...and you don't get points for looking good. You can save up to four custom craft in your garage and then transfer them to an *F-Zero AX* arcade machine to win more new parts. Can't find an arcade? Then all you have to do is complete the Story Mode chapters on the Hard setting. If you want the prebuilt AX machines, beat them on Very Hard. And if you want the AX tracks? Beat all four GX cups on Master difficulty. Maybe you should just find an arcade....



→ There are four cups in the game: Ruby, Sapphire, Emerald, and Diamond. (The Diamond Cup is unlocked by winning first place overall in the Ruby, Sapphire, and Emerald Cups.) Each cup is comprised of five courses—we went and picked the three most difficult in each. Here's how to beat 'em....

RUBY CUP

This easiest Grand Prix has a fairly basic course design. The straightaways are wide and the curves are manageable without too much effort.

SAND OCEAN: SURFACE SLIDE

→ Hit the zip line before the first drop onto the narrow pathway, then boost in midair or as soon as you drop. When you enter the pyramid, there'll be recharge strips on both sides. Right after the strips, there's a hard right turn and then a hard left, so use the shoulder buttons to give you that extra lean. Boost as soon as you emerge from the hard left turn. Watch your energy meter as you make your way through the ridged part of the track, as there's still a little ways to go before you hit the recharge zone.



LIGHTNING: LOOP CROSS



→ When you reach the high point of the first loop, hit the boost and line yourself up toward the left to catch the zip line coming out of the loop, then make the hard spiraling turn to the right. The course will temporarily split twice. In the first section, the energy strip is on the right and the zips are on the left. The reverse is true for the second section. On the first lap, go left, then right. On the remaining laps, boost through both recharge zones. When you enter a building and start to curve right, the finish line is close. Turn on the afterburners and plow through.

AEROPOLIS: MULTIPLEX

→ Ignore the jump right at the beginning, it'll only lead to death and sorrow. This course is littered with 90 degree turns (and even a 180 degree turn), but don't worry—just use the shoulder buttons to lean through them. In order to navigate the 180 degree turn, stop accelerating right before you get there, make a hard left, and then boost as soon as you're in the clear. Be careful of the large jump leading down to the recharge strips; you might have to steer in midair in order to stay on course. If you're feeling dangerous, use your boost liberally throughout the dirt and ice areas, as there's a long recharge strip on the hill right before the finish line.



SAPPHIRE CUP

This is where things start to get tricky. Keep an eye out for sharp 90 degree turns and long jumps that separate you from the relative safety of the track.

PORT TOWN: AERO DIVE



PORT TOWN: LONG PIPE

→ There are three consecutive large areas with rotating pipes that'll block your progress if you're not careful. Time their movements and steer around them. While in the small pipes, try to keep a straight line. Too much moving back and forth will cause you to lose traction, and thus, speed. There's a section of tubing before the finish line that has small pipes jetting out. They're easy to avoid, just don't go down the middle as you run over the last zip strip.



→ There's a series of ramps that go down right at the beginning; slightly tilt your ship up as you land so you don't lose too much speed. There's a giant drop at the top of the large hill where R.O.B. the robot sits (remember him?). Boost when you hit the ground and then boost again when you reach the bottom of the second group of ramps. Immediately after that, there'll be two or three jumps that curve outward; try to stay away from the edge or you'll go flying into the metropolis below. There's only one recharge strip on the track, and it's at the end of the lap, so be prudent.

MUTE CITY: SERIAL GAPS

→ Depending on your skill level and the difficulty setting, Serial Gaps can be either really fun or really frustrating. It's the first course that presents a constant danger of falling off, and falling off means you have to restart the race from the beginning. The first zipper launches you into a short tunnel with a recharge strip and a group of mines. Right after that comes two short curve drops (don't lean too much to the side) and then a straight section of track with three jumps to the right. Use boost right before hitting the jumps, then cut across the track and over to where the ice slicks begin. The very next left turn will launch you across a large gap with two levels of track to land on. Pitch your ship up to catch some air and glide to the top portion of the track, then hit the zipper as you ascend and curve to the right. Immediately veer left in midair to get back onto the main track and on your way to the finish line.



EMERALD CUP

Our favorite track in the game is Green Plant: Intersection. The tube you race through actually weaves in and out of the regular part of the track. We think that's cool.

GREEN PLANT: INTERSECTION

→ In the beginning outdoor areas, alternate your boosts and zip lines until you reach the tube, then just use boost. Don't be stingy with it, there are two recharge strips inside the tubes. When you get out of the tube, you'll have to do some slaloming between the pipes sticking in the ground (the ones you were just inside, ain't that clever?). As soon as you hit a zipper, angle yourself to hit the next one. Your competitors will be flawless with this on the higher difficulty settings, so master it quickly. By the time you're done weaving in and out, Intersection will throw the nastiest little bend in the game at you (below). Stay to the left as the track bends or you'll become a permanent part of that giant tree.



LIGHTNING: HALF-PIPE

→ Do you know what "half-pipe" means? It means you have twice the chance of falling off the track as you would in a full pipe. There are zip strips on the edges of the pipes; if you're going to hit them, make sure you're planning your next turn in advance or you're a goner. Banking left and right with the shoulder buttons helps in the tighter spots of the track. After the twisting straightaway with the four zippers ends, use a boost to keep your speed going. The lasers near the end of the track won't do much—unless you have very little energy remaining, then they'll kill ya. Don't blame them, it's what lasers do.



BIG BLUE: ORDEAL

→ "Ordeal" is right. The second Big Blue track combines the sharp 90 degree turns and confusing drops we've seen in previous tracks. When navigating the tight turns, don't be afraid to let go of the accelerator for a second (but only for a second). The toughest part of the track? It's the large jump that requires you to steer left and back onto the course below. As your reward for making it, there's a recharge strip to the right of the ice and dirt sections right after the jump.



DIAMOND CUP

The most challenging Grand Prix in the game, especially the final three courses. If you can win the Diamond Cup in Master class, well, you're one of life's winners.

SAND OCEAN: LATERAL SHIFT

→ Lateral Shift is another intense high-speed, boost-friendly track, but it's very narrow and you have to note where the track ends. After every series of lateral shifts, there'll be a long recharge strip, so use your boost often. Right before the finish line, the track narrows to a very thin strip. That might be a good place to use your attacks.



AEROPOLIS: DRAGON SLOPE



PHANTOM ROAD: SLIM-LINE

→ Phantom Road is advertised as the most difficult course in the game. Not necessarily so. The major things you need to watch out for are the recharge strips that end in a drop-off into the Rez-like void of space and music, and the general bumpiness of the tracks, which might make you lose traction and send you slamming into the guardrails. It's close quarters for the majority of the race, so if you're running at Expert or Master class, you might want to take this opportunity to kill some fools.



→ The first two recharge strips are located on some really nasty bends, so you might not be able to get a full charge from just one. Immediately following the long drop down the descending floating track sections (try to stay on the top ones), there'll be a large section of ice and dirt that you have to go through. Stay on the ice patch and try not to boost or move too much. After that, there'll be a recharge strip in the middle of the track as it starts to narrow. Use a boost, then use your spin move to clear a path (and hopefully take out some of the competition).



A.I.

HIS CODES ARE REAL. BUT HE IS NOT

This month's collection of codes takes us from a galaxy far, far away to sunny beaches, then to downtown Springfield.



XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC



01 STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC XBOX

➔ Not satisfied with the ending you got? Want to see another one? Fire up a saved game that's almost finished and have an additional controller plugged into port four. When you're at the door to the final battle with Darth Malak [don't open the door], press L1 + R1 + Y simultaneously on both controllers [if you don't have a friend to help you with this...use the Force]. You'll know you've done it right if your character pulls out his lightsaber. Once you've entered the code, talk to Malak.

02 DOWNHILL DOMINATION PS2

➔ If you can't find enough ways to inflict grievous bodily injury on your racers [are you really trying hard enough?], use these and break the laws of physics...and some bones. During gameplay, punch in the master code, then enter the others for various effects.

Master Code

Up, Triangle, Down, X, Left, Circle,
Right, Square

Super Bounce

Left, Square, X, Up, Triangle

Antigravity

Down, Triangle, Square, Square, Up

Megaflip

Right, Up, Up, Right, Right, Square

Super Bunny Hop

Up, X, Left, Square, Up

Adrenaline Boost

Down, Left, Left, Right

Stoke Trick Meter

Down, Left, Left, Right, Right

Combat Upgrade

Up, Down, Left, Left, Right

Upgrade to Bottle

Up, Down, Left, Left, Right, Right

Energy Restore

Down, Right, Right, Left, Left

Free Money

Right, Up, Up, Circle, Circle, Square

03 OUTLAW VOLLEYBALL XBOX



➔ If you can't wait for summer [and those of you who have the game know what we mean], you can hurry things along with this group of codes. Be sure to use the digital pad and not the analog sticks.

Unlock All Characters

Go to the Character Select screen in Exhibition mode. Hold L1 and press Left, White, Right, White.

Maximum Stats

Go to the Character Select screen in Exhibition mode. Hold R1 and press Left, White, Right, White. A sound should confirm correct entry.

Big Head Mode

During gameplay, hold L1 and press B, A, B, Y.

Big (well, use your imagination) Mode

During gameplay, hold L1 and press B, Up, Up, B, Y. We'd like to thank the developers at Hypnotix for such a brilliantly uns subtle code.

04 SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX XBOX



➔ If you're having difficulty saving the free world—or you just like having lots of guns, ammo, and targets that don't shoot back—use these and scratch your itchy

MORE

tips, codes, strategies, DVDs, and more!

trigger finger. During gameplay, click and hold the Left analog stick. While holding it down, enter these codes for the effects listed.

God Mode

B, A, Y, X

All Weapons

X, Y, A, B

Unlimited Ammo

Black, A, Y, White

Level Select

Black, B, A, White

05 SPEED KINGS

GC, PS2, Xbox



If you're finding it difficult to make it through this rather difficult racer without crashing, enter one of these as your racer name. Remember to include the period at the beginning of each one.

Eighteen Best Laps

.apt18

All Driving Tests Complete

.test9

All Meets Won

.meet6

Grand Prix Mode Finished

.prix

Custom Respect Points

.resp[insert desired number of points]

So if you want 50 points, type .resp50

06 TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS

DS



Lara's back in yet another *Tomb Raider*, and we must say she's looking her breast. If you're having trouble with a certain level or want to skip around in the game and see all the sights, you can use this handy level-select code. Pause the game, then hold L1 + R2 + Down + Triangle. Let them go, then quickly press Circle, Up, Square, Triangle, Right, Down. A new menu will appear, and it lets you take on the world. Be advised that this code is difficult to enter. It might take you a few tries to get it to work.

07 PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

Xbox



You might not be as cool as Johnny Depp or as gorgeous as Keira Knightley, but you can always cheat like hell. Heck, it's part of the pirate code. Input these codes while you're in control of a character (i.e., when you're not

controlling your ship).

God Mode

A, Y, X, Y, Y, B, Y, X, A

100,000 Gold

A, X, Y, B, Y, B, X, B, B, A

50 Skill Points

A, B, Y, X, Y, B, B, Y, B, A

Neutral Reputation

A, X, Y, X, Y, B, B, Y, B, A

09 MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR

GC



If you want a few more modes of play, hold Z while you press Start at the Title screen. You'll unlock a Hole In One Tournament and a password option. Enter CEUPXJ1 at the Password screen to start the Target Tour mode.

10 NAVAL OPS: WARSHIP GUNNER

PS2



Tired of budget cuts, liberty bonds, and money going to the arts instead of the military (where it belongs)? Go to the Dock screen and quickly enter Left, Left, Right, Right, L2, R2, R1, L1, Square, Triangle. You'll suddenly have \$999,999,999.

GEORGE JUST WANTS TO DIRECT, AND A PERFECTA TRIFECTA OF COMEDY BOX SETS

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

→ Of course, this is the most important question you have to ask yourself: "Do you like my moustache?"

CONFESIONS OF A DANGEROUS MIND

IT WASN'T ALL FUN AND GAMES

RATED R | 114 MINUTES | 1 DISC | DIRECTED BY GEORGE CLOONEY

→ Chuck Barris—creator of some of the most popular TV shows of the '60s and '70s—was, it turns out, a government assassin. Incredible, perhaps, but that's the startling story unraveled here in George Clooney's debut in the director's chair.

Barris (Sam Rockwell) gave us *The Newlywed Game* and *The Gong Show*. Apparently, when not hosting these popular but trashy affairs, he divided his time between cheating on his long-term girlfriend, Penny (Drew Barrymore), and murdering people for the CIA. His claims have never been substantiated, but they have never been disproved.

Clooney extends his smooth

talents as actor to directing. *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* is a subtle, difficult blend of drama, comedy, and biography, and the direction is deft but firm when required; all first-time directors should have such great casts. Those who suspected that Clooney had bitten off more than he could chew for his first gig behind the camera should be pleasantly proved wrong.

Given the somewhat surreal nature of the material, it's inevitable that the script—based on Barris' autobiography—walks a fine line between simply relating events and giving us a glimpse into the mind of an unusual man,

to say the least. Screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, who penned *Being John Malkovich* and *Adaptation*—surprisingly plays it relatively straight.

True or not, *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* is a great introduction to Clooney's directing career, an excellent showcase for Rockwell's talents, and well worth considering if it didn't make it on to your big-screen radar.

Special features: A slightly above-average package, including director commentary, a behind-the-scenes feature, Sam Rockwell's screen test, and real *Gong Show* acts. **KE**

MORE

Top codes, strategies, tips, and more!



MR. SHOW: COMPLETE THIRD SEASON

HEY. EVERYBODY! IT'S A DVD!

CREATED BY BOB ODENKIRK AND DAVID CROSS | 10 EPISODES

→ The funny guy/straight man act is a traditional comedy routine. Bob Odenkirk and David Cross—the writers and stars of *Mr. Show*—do not fit this mold. They're not just two funny guys, either. They are two intelligent, sublimely funny guys who have created one of the oddest, most hilarious satirical shows ever broadcast.

Biting satire is a tough sell—it can change from acutely well-observed brilliance into rubbish in one missed step. However, with Odenkirk and Cross as anchors, this show never loses its footing. On paper, this is sketch comedy, but the boundaries are deliberately blurred, as each set piece seamlessly morphs into the next. Some of the segues are works of comedy genius in their own right.

Make no mistake: This is hip, intelligent comedy that mixes traditional targets of ridicule, such as local-news broadcasts and religious TV, with subjects rarely—if ever—skewered before, including hunger strikes, mustard, and roller coasters!

The DVD consists of 10 episodes that were originally broadcast in 1997. The show's focus on broad comedic categories rather than specific events means episodes are as fresh today as they were then.

Special features: The two-disc set includes episode commentaries from Odenkirk, Cross, and other cast members; a "Bob and David at the 1997 U.S. Comedy Arts Festival" feature; and TV spots. **KE**

THE SIMPSONS SEASON 3, FINALLY



Is there anybody out there who does not enjoy *The Simpsons*? Any show still going after 14 seasons is its own testament to consistently good writing and some degree of risk taking. *The Simpsons* hit its stride pretty early on, and this package boasts a number of classic episodes that could make a reasonable case for Best Episode Ever.

"Flaming Moe's" has Moe stealing the limelight by stealing Homer's brilliant cocktail recipe; plus, Aerosmith provides a guest-star appearance. "Stark Raving Dad" (the season opener) gives us the sublimely surreal experience of Michael Jackson as a guest voice.

A four-disc box set with 24 episodes, this collection continues the solid tradition of *Simpsons* box-set quality and value. The greatest TV show ever? Probably...

Special features: The package includes commentary on every episode, storyboards and sketches, TV spots, a baby-translator feature, audio outtakes, and more. **KE**



THE SIMPSONS: SEASON 3 □ FOX HOME VIDEO □ CREATED BY: MATT GROENING □ DISCS: 4 □ EPISODES: 24

FAMILY GUY YOU'LL LAUGH AND CRY



→ When news of *Family Guy*'s cancellation broke after the show's third season, fans submitted an online petition with more than 100,000 signatures to Fox. Clearly, *Family Guy* is popular (and it is often wonderfully twisted), but is it the greatest TV show ever? No—that's *The Simpsons*, remember?

There's some smart comedy here, but there are also plenty of cheap laughs. Dysfunction is, as with most animated families, a rich source of material. *Family Guy* distinguishes itself with ludicrous, lunatic plots that few other series would dare try. Two examples: Peter giving the grim reaper dating tips before hooking him up with the girl who works at the pet store, as well as the family dog joining the police sniffer unit and becoming addicted to cocaine.

Some of the characters occasionally grate on the ear—the megalomaniac baby, Stewie, and the family dog, in particular. This box of *Family Guy* offers 22 episodes on three discs, and there's enough quality here to make one wonder if this show could have continued to pull in viewers if it had lived a season (or two) longer.

Special features: Commentary on six episodes; a never-before-seen episode called "When You Wish Upon a Weinstein"; animations; the pilot pitch; and a season overview. **KE**

FAMILY GUY: VOL. 2 □ FOX HOME VIDEO □ CREATED BY: SETH MCFARLANE □ DISCS: 3 □ EPISODES: 22

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

RETRONACTIVE

IT'S SATURN MONTH, KIDS. YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS? OF COURSE YOU DO.

PC

PS2

LAST BRONX

THE BRONX NEVER LOOKED LIKE THIS

SEGA SATURN | OCTOBER 1997

→ Since *Soul Calibur II* is the glint in nearly every gamer's eye right now, we thought it would be a great time to reinvestigate a long-lost 3D weapons brawler. And no, we're not talking about *Toshinden*, thanks. We've got bigger fish to fry.

Last Bronx, developed by then-trendy AM3 (*Sega Rally*), is a fighting game set in the urban sectors of Tokyo, such as Roppongi and Shinjuku. Originally developed in 1996 for arcades using Sega's Model 2 hardware, *Last Bronx* eventually came home to Saturn in late 1997. The extremely limited number of arcade units that made it to the States

(coupled with *Virtua Fighter 3*'s recent release) might explain the game's low profile and subsequent lack of success in the States.

Still, based on the game's achievements—namely some gritty, urban characters leach bearing brutal weapons such as nunchaku, three-section staves, etc.; *Virtua Fighter*-style fighting mechanics; slick graphics; and cool gang names such as G-Troops, Helter Skelter, Shinjuku Mad, and NeoSoul—it's sad AM3 never created the rumored sequel using Model 3 hardware. Maybe it's about time for a comeback. ←

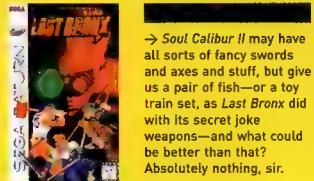
—James Mielke

NOW... Although *Last Bronx* pales next to superior 3D weapons fighters like *Soul Calibur II*, we want a sequel. And we want it now. HARD TO FIND

GMR 7/10

THEN... Good-looking and fun to play, *Last Bronx* walked in the shadow of the valley of *Virtua Fighter 3*, and therefore no one cared. A pity, that.

GMR 8/10



→ *Soul Calibur II* may have all sorts of fancy swords and axes and stuff, but give us a pair of fish—or a toy train set, as *Last Bronx* did with its secret joke weapons—and what could be better than that? Absolutely nothing, sir.



→ Somehow, no one could manage to get the control right in either the Dreamcast version of VO: Oratorio Tangram or the recent PS2 game *Virtual On Marz*. Saturn's version is still the best.



→ OK, so you can't customize jack, except to swap 1p and 2p colors, but *Virtual On* for Saturn offers great control and fast action. Other games in the genre, such as *Armored Core*, *MechAssault*, and *Steel Battalion*, feel sluggish by comparison.

VIRTUAL ON

GIANT ROBOTS GONNA KNOCK YOU OUT

SEGA SATURN | NOVEMBER 1996

→ Back when *Virtua Fighter 3* (and later, *Virtua Fighter 3 TB*) ruled the Japanese arcade charts for well over a year, it wasn't the arrival of *Tekken 3* that finally bumped it from the top spot. In fact, it wasn't even a fighting game that toppled VF3. It was *Cyber Troopers Virtual On*.

While the series has, like many Japanese things, never been nearly as popular in North America as it has been in the East, *Virtual On* is still many things to many people. Anime fans will appreciate the mech designs of Katoh Hajime, the renowned mechanical artist whose work is found in such classic anime as *Gundam* and *Patlabor*. Second, the series was, at the time, developed by AM3 (now called Hitmaker!), whose track record was

second only to Yu Suzuki's AM2 division for cranking out arcade hits. The pedigree was worth more than a mere name-dropping, however, since *Virtual On* provides limber, mech-on-mech combat that has yet to be equaled.

Utilizing a unique dual-joystick setup in the arcades, Sega managed to bring home a clean rendition for the Sega Saturn. While Japanese gamers got a replica controller that mimicked the arcade arrangement perfectly, gamers in the States had to make do with the less-glamorous, but still functional, control scheme for the standard Saturn pad. Interestingly, the control in later iterations of the series isn't nearly as efficient as the original version's. ←

—James Mielke

NOW... While there is zero customization (except for color swapping), *Virtual On* still holds its own next to games like *Armored Core*. HARD TO FIND

GMR 7/10

THEN... While it certainly wasn't as pretty as its arcade counterpart, *Virtual On* for Saturn brought all the fast-paced thrills home. No small feat.

GMR 7/10



← No, you're not seeing things. That is in fact Sonic the Hedgehog, making an appearance in the giveaway disc, *Christmas NiGHTS*, which Sonic Team produced for its fans. We can only dream of what a NiGHTS game on, say, GameCube would look like now.

NiGHTS INTO DREAMS

THE CHÂTEAU LAFITE ROTHSCHILD OF VIDEOGAMES

SEGA SATURN | AUGUST 1996

→ Back in 1996 when Sega's beleaguered Saturn was trying to hold off Sony's fledgling PlayStation's full-court press, a glimmer of hope made its way to Sega supporters. The mighty Sonic Team, it was reported, would unleash its first 3D Saturn game and lead the charge into the console wars. Naturally, everyone thought Sonic's rebirth was close at hand. What the people wanted and what they got, however, were two entirely different things.

Something of a boutique project for Lead Designer Takashi Iizuka (who went on to direct *Sonic Adventure 1* and *2*), and one overseen (but not designed) by Yuji Naka, *NiGHTS* is experimental, challenging, beautiful, emotional, limited, and awe-inspiring all at once.

Tellingly, *NiGHTS* is a game that has gotten better with age.

Featuring a story that primarily takes place in the minds of two troubled children from the town of Twin Seeds, the game gives the player control of the titular *NiGHTS*, a Nightmaren who revolts against his master, the Wizeman, by possessing the body of whichever child you select at the game's start. The action sends you soaring through carefully designed 3D worlds explored on a 2D plane (think *Klonoa*). Essentially a series of time attacks, your goal is to fly through the environments as quickly as possible, collecting the orbs of dream energy known as Ideya. By gathering the Ideya in rapid fashion, you form chains; the longer the chain, the greater your overall ranking at the end of the

level. Enemies can be extinguished by flying a loop around them, which creates a vortex they disappear into.

This gameplay premise is exceptionally pure and holds up better in hindsight; at the time, everyone expected *NiGHTS* to be Sega's answer to *Super Mario 64*. A graphical powerhouse, *NiGHTS'* dreamy visuals are matched by its involving, affectionate score, replete with upbeat jingles and full vocal tracks. Sonic Team released a free bonus disc titled *Christmas NiGHTS* that holiday season.

Considering how many times Yuji Naka has said there will never be another *NiGHTS* game, we'll have to settle for this singular, spectacular touchstone of videogame history. **IC**

—James Mielke

NOW... An innovator of its time and cruelly overlooked, too. Experienced now, it truly stands out among its peers as timeless. **HARD TO FIND**

GMR VINTAGE 10/10

THEN... Criticized at the time for its length, *NiGHTS* is a misunderstood masterpiece that formed a world unlike any seen since.

GMR MISUNDERSTOOD 8/10

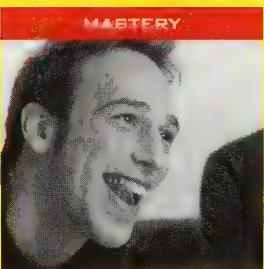
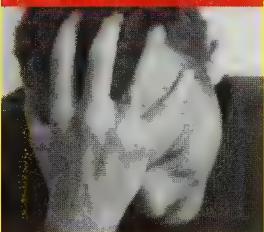


→ A genuine classic, it's worth buying a Saturn just to play this title.

DISCOVERY



FRUSTRATION



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PREOWNED GAMES.

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THE LIST

GMA'S EXHAUSTIVE GUIDE TO THE ONLY GAMES THAT MATTER

BUYER'S GUIDE

PS2 TOP 100 FOOTBALL IS IN SEASON



PS2	.hack//Infection	Bandai	The world's first MMORPG, but this time the "O" stands for "offline." Comes packed with a DVD of the animated series.	7
	.hack//Mutation	Bandai	We've exhausted our supply of "something within a something" jokes, so just know that the series starts to pick up in this sequel.	8
	Amplitude	Sony	A whole slew of new artists who, naturally, bring along brand-new tunes for your button-pressing pleasure.	8
	ATV Offroad Fury	Sony	The key to being a successful ATV offroader lies in launching yourself through the air as often as possible. A fun and floaty racer.	9
	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	Interplay	A beautiful-looking <i>Dungeons & Dragons</i> -based hack-and-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.	8
	Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	An RPG that forces you to die and start over multiple times? It sounds ridiculous, but it actually works.	8
	Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	An aggressive driving simulator that defies the rules of physics. Includes a dedicated Crash mode for aspiring demolition-derby stars.	8
	Capcom vs. SNK 2	Capcom	Take the best elements of <i>Street Fighter</i> and <i>King of Fighters</i> , and you'll have the best thing going in the world of 2D combat.	8
	Chaos Legion	Capcom	Storm through 15 levels of nonstop action, commanding various squads of bodyguards. It's like <i>Devil May Cry</i> , only not so antisocial.	8
	Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	A superb rally racer with superrealistic properties—right down to the extended time you spend sitting in the Ford Focus.	8
	Contra: Shattered Soldier	Konami	After numerous shoddy attempts to bring the classic <i>Contra</i> gameplay to a next-gen system, Konami finally gets it right.	9
	Crazy Taxi	Acclaim	As good as opening your PlayStation 2, rigging Dreamcast hardware inside, and then loading up a CD build of <i>Crazy Taxi</i> .	8
	Dance Dance Revolution: DDRMax	Konami	Before, if you wanted to play <i>DDR</i> , you had to subject yourself to Joe and Jane Public. Now, you can embarrass yourself at home.	8
	Dark Cloud 2	Sony	Improves upon the first one in every way imaginable. Building and upgrading weapons to your liking is a blast.	9
	Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	Acclaim	Before turning to Larry Flynt for inspiration, <i>XXX</i> was based on the well-mannered Dave Mirra and actually focused on biking.	8
	Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore	Tecmo	Before the entire series went Xbox exclusive, Team Ninja's gang of jiggly grapplers found a temporary home on PS2.	8
	Deus Ex: The Conspiracy	Eidos	One of the best PC games of 2000 is ported faithfully to PS2. Upgrade your character's skills and attributes as you see fit.	8
	Devil May Cry	Capcom	Did you know <i>Devil May Cry</i> was going to be <i>Resident Evil 4</i> before it was spun off into its own series? Oh, you did? Never mind, then.	9
	Dynasty Warriors 3	Koei	Melee combat set to the history of ancient China. Enemies number in the hundreds along branching story paths.	8
	Escape from Monkey Island	LucasArts	LucasArts has a fine tradition of putting out excellent graphical adventure games, and this latest charmer is no exception.	9
	ESPN NFL Football	Sega	The new first-person mode is an interesting addition to a solid game of football, but it's still not enough to top <i>Madden</i> .	8
	EverQuest Online Adventures	Sony Online	PS2 owners finally get to see what the whole <i>EverQuest</i> thing is about—and will never be seen again.	8
	Final Fantasy X	Square EA	PS2's first <i>Final Fantasy</i> does away the traditional overworld but introduces full voice acting. Artistically beautiful, as always.	9
	The Getaway	Sony	Opinions vary wildly on this British-themed gangster (not gangsta) game. Even the British can't agree!	8
	Gran Turismo 3 A-spec	Sony	Core gameplay is unchanged, but the graphics get a complete overhaul, which makes <i>GT3</i> the best-playing/looking sim on the market.	10
	Grand Theft Auto III	Rockstar Games	A phenomenon of both gameplay and sales. A free-roaming interactive mobster film that's sold more than 8 million copies to date.	9
	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	As bad boy Tommy Vercetti, there's something indescribably cool about cruising Vice City's beach strip while rocking to "Billie Jean."	10
	Guilty Gear XX	Sammy	Tired of waiting for <i>Street Fighter 4</i> ? This one should more than compensate. Great visuals, great control, and great extras.	8
	Half-Life	Sierra	After it was cancelled for Dreamcast, a console version of this PC classic didn't seem very likely. But here we are.	8
	Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland	Natsume	It's a farming simulator. It's fun. These two statements may seem wildly incongruous, but somehow, <i>Harvest Moon</i> makes it work.	8
	High Heat 2004	3DO	The best ball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	9
	Hitman 2	Eidos	Most of the problems with the original <i>Hitman</i> have been fixed, making this one of the more rewarding action games on PS2.	9
	Hot Shots Golf 3	Sony	Some golf games need something extra to attract gamers. How about arcade-style control, annoying taunts, and multiplayer modes?	9
	Ico	Sony	An underappreciated work of art with challenging puzzles, fantastic lighting, and engrossing character relationships.	9
	Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy	Sony	The studio that gave birth to <i>Crash Bandicoot</i> brings a couple new mascots and a gorgeous new 3D world to PS2.	8
	K-1 Grand Prix	Konami	The budding sport of K1 is faithfully represented here, as are the knockout blows to the jaw that sound just as painful as they look.	8
	Kingdom Hearts	Square EA	When the amazing, talented artists from Square join forces with the amazing, talented artists from Disney, good things happen.	8
	Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil	Namco	<i>Klonoa</i> became a rare find in the later days of PlayStation. The outstanding sequel looks to share the same fate. Grab it if you can.	8
	The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	EA Games	Anything bearing the valuable <i>Lord of the Rings</i> license will sell well. Happily, there's more to this beat-em-up than just the name.	8
	Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive Owner's mode.	9
	The Mark of Kri	Sony	A slick action game with innovative controls: Each button is assigned to a different enemy, allowing for combat with multiple targets.	8
	Maximo: Ghosts to Glory	Capcom	It's the spiritual successor to the classic <i>Ghosts 'n' Goblins</i> , complete with heart boxes and insane difficulty.	8
	MDK 2: Armageddon	Interplay	Much improved over the original Dreamcast incarnation, <i>MDK 2 Armageddon</i> is one of the better recent action games.	8
	Medal of Honor: Frontline	Electronic Arts	A strong single-player campaign paves the way through the beaches of Normandy and the heart of France. Great audio.	8
	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	There's a lot in this update: 350 VR missions, 150 alternate missions, five Snake Tales, and one skateboard. Yes, a skateboard.	9
	Midnight Club 2	Rockstar Games	Rockstar's rebellious racer is now online, but you'd better practice mastering the game's controls before entering competition.	8
	Mobile Suit Gundam: Federation vs. Zeon	Bandai	Giant robots are great, but basing them on the <i>Gundam</i> license with Capcom developing makes them greater, if that's even possible.	8
	MotoGP 3	Namco	After three attempts, Namco got it right...sort of. The realism is astounding, as long as you ignore the giant Mr. Driller.	9
	NASCAR Thunder 2003	EA Sports	Hate turning left for hours? NASCAR games probably aren't your thing. But if you get it, <i>Thunder 2003</i> should be right up your alley.	9
	NBA 2K3	Sega Sports	Yet another compelling reason to own a PS2 Network Adaptor, <i>NBA 2K3</i> is the best-playing game of hoops on the system.	9

NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, Vol. 2 takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2003	EA Sports	A lot like <i>Madden</i> , only with exploited college kids and marching bands. It's also the best college football game available.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent <i>NCAA 2003</i> , added some new blocking and pass defense enhancements, and produced another winner	9
Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	EA Games	Strangely, the game's best version is on the least-powerful hardware. Running from cops has never been this fun, or consequence free.	9
NHL 2002	Electronic Arts	Hockey is played on ice, with six men trying to put a puck into the other team's goal. This is a good digital representation of that sport.	8
NHL 2K3	Sega Sports	For the more discerning hockey connoisseur, <i>NHL2K3</i> has made great strides since its debut on the now-defunct Dreamcast.	9
Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny	Capcom	The effort put forward in defeating Nobunaga in <i>Onimusha</i> has gone to waste, as he's risen from the dead and is appearing in the sequel.	8
Onimusha: Warlords	Capcom	Survival-horror with a taste for feudal Japan, gorgeous artistic design, and a whole lot more action than its <i>Resident Evil</i> kin.	8
RAD: Robot Alchemic Drive	Enix	It's hard to go wrong with giant robots blowing stuff up, but Enix's latest effort goes one step further with a novel control scheme.	8
Ratchet & Clank	Sony	Insomniac's terrific action-platformer has you jumping from world to world in search of new weapons and gadgets.	8
Rayman 2: Revolution	Ubi Soft	One of the best 3D platformers available, the <i>Rayman</i> franchise doesn't get the attention it deserves: It's good, and you should buy it.	9
Red Faction	THQ	A first-person shooter that features destructible environments, driveable vehicles, and a strong single-player campaign.	9
Resident Evil Code: Veronica X	Capcom	More of a true sequel than <i>Resident Evil 3</i> , its Dreamcast debut meant many fans missed out. Problem solved!	8
Rez	Sega	A fairly standard shooter dressed as a visual and aural masterpiece. Sadly unappreciated by the vast majority of the gaming world.	8
Ridge Racer V	Namco	The always enjoyable <i>Ridge Racer</i> series scores well, thanks to solid control, an enthralling sense of speed, and a fitting soundtrack.	9
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure	Tecmo	This Greek mythology-based action game is an update of the arcade and NES classic in name only. Fun combat and great music.	9
Sega Sports Tennis	Sega	Arcade-style tennis perfection when it launched for Dreamcast. It's holding up just as well on PS2.	8
Silent Hill 2	Konami	More creepy than downright scary, the <i>Silent Hill</i> series takes a more sophisticated, cerebral approach to the survival-horror genre.	8
Silent Hill 3	Konami	The third chapter of this grisly horror show once again has you running down dark hallways with a flashlight.	8
The Sims	Electronic Arts	A new mode helps you figure out how to keep your Sim from pissing himself. Or, if you're like that, how to make him do it.	9
Sky Gunner	Atmos	If you can look past the slowdown issue (and it can be a pretty big issue at times), <i>Sky Gunner</i> is great shooting fun.	8
Sky Odyssey	Activision	A flight game that channels the spirit of <i>Flightwings</i> , with mission-based gameplay and a large array of aircraft to pilot.	8
Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus	Sony	A solid platformer with a unique aesthetic and animations. Lacks a little in the challenge department; it's a little on the short side, too.	8
Smuggler's Run	Rockstar Games	In keeping with Rockstar's games, <i>Smuggler's Run</i> indulges the inner criminal in all of us.	8
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs	Sony	Possibly the best reason to own a PS2 Network Adaptor. The team-based military tactics work better online than off.	9
Soul Calibur 2	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as <i>VF: Evolution</i> .	9
Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	As expected, the PS2 port of the Xbox original takes a graphical hit. Doesn't mean it's not still a great game, though.	8
Spy Hunter	Midway	A re-creation of the classic that manages to avoid tarnishing all the good memories, which can't be said for a lot of classic remakes.	8
SSX	Electronic Arts	A surprisingly good snowboarder with over-the-top stunts and great course design; it stands out as one of the better PS2 launch titles.	8
SSX Tricky	Electronic Arts	<i>SSX Tricky</i> boasts a new set of insane gravity-defying and physically impossible stunts, not to mention all-new tracks and characters.	8
Sub Rebellion	Metro3D	Customizable submarines rule the waters of the future; <i>Sub Rebellion</i> is an action game that's short on graphics but very entertaining.	8
Tekken Tag Tournament	Namco	Essentially <i>Tekken 3</i> with enhanced graphics and a tag-teaming. Which isn't bad, considering <i>Tekken 3</i> is a great game to begin with.	8
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	Activision	<i>Tenchu</i> sneaked onto the list without us noticing. We were drunk on sake and telling tales of heroism, so that might be why.	8
Theme Park Roller Coaster	Electronic Arts	<i>Sim City</i> meets Six Flags. Design your own dangerous roller coasters without fear of getting slapped with wrongful-death lawsuits.	8
TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Everything good about the original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options, including maps, weapons, and game modes, too.	8
Tokyo Xtreme Racer Zero	Crave	Cruise Tokyo's highways in search of less-than-legal street-racing action. Despite some visual issues, it's definitely worth checking out.	8
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft dropped the 2-minute time limit in Career mode and added an array of objectives. Level design is a step up from <i>THPS3</i> .	9
Twisted Metal: Black	Sony	With the franchise safely out of the hands of 989 Studios, <i>Twisted Metal</i> makes a welcome return to its former, gruesome glory.	9
Twisted Metal: Black Online	Sony	If you buy a PS2 Network Adaptor, you get it for free. Which kind of makes sense, considering you can't play it without one.	8
Virtua Fighter 4	Sega	The <i>Virtua Fighter</i> series has always been finely crafted, and this version is no exception. The game's depth is staggering.	10
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	The greatest 3D fighter ever created, and it's only a measly \$20. Mow the lawn twice, and it's yours.	10
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sport title that manages to make the Tony Hawk formula work on water.	9
War of the Monsters	Sony	King Kong's agent wanted a cool \$20 mil for this fun beat-em-up, but Sony balked and went with the less-recognizable Congar.	9
Wild Arms 3	Sony	A grand adventure with a Wild West theme, endearing characters, great music, and a refreshingly uncomplicated battle system.	8
Wipeout Fusion	Barn	The Designer's Republic touch may be missing, but the series' oft-imitated, never surpassed style of racing remains intact.	8
World Series Baseball 2K3	Sega	<i>WSB2K3</i> is the best-looking baseball game with a great Franchise mode, but it's got A.I. issues that need to be worked out.	8
World Soccer: Winning Eleven 6	Konami	Feet down, the most natural-feeling soccer game ever. It lacks <i>FIFA</i> 's presentation and licenses, but makes up for it in gameplay.	9
WWF SmackDown!: Just Bring It	THQ	Even if this game scored a zero, it would still sell a truckload of copies. Such is the marketing power of Vince McMahon and family.	8
Xenosaga	Namco	A massive RPG of epic story and length. Namco's now in charge of the <i>Xeno</i> series, and this is the first of many planned chapters.	9
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	Better enemies, better pacing, better music, better stages, and better weapons. What we're trying to say is, <i>ZOE2</i> is better than the first.	8

[BUY]

WILD ARMS 3

→ You won't find too many RPGs that take place in the Old West (well, the theme at least), but that's where *Wild Arms* gets a lot of charm and personality. Just like previous *Arms* games, *WA3* has solid combat, clever dungeon puzzles, a well-written story, and a killer soundtrack. Giddyup.



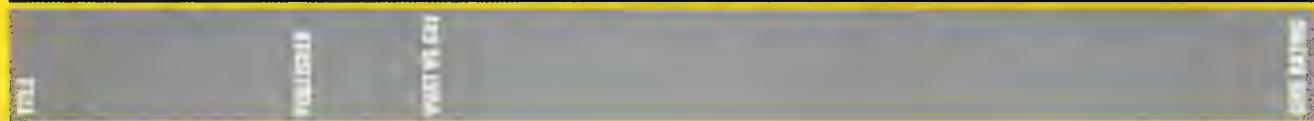
[AVOID!]

TOMB RAIDER: AOD

→ Only a month after *Angel of Darkness'* release, Eidos announced it had taken away the *Tomb Raider* franchise from Core Design and gave it to a new team at Crystal Dynamics. We can only hope Crystal Dynamics learns from the mistakes made in *Angel of Darkness*. And there are many, many mistakes....



PC TOP 50 GOING BACK TO VICE CITY



Aliens vs. Predator 2	Sierra	Three completely different first-person shooters combined into one dark and terrifying gaming experience.	9
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn	Interplay	The rare occasion when the sequel to a classic goes above and beyond its predecessor. Can't wait for III.	9
Black & White	EA Games	Highly conceptual "god game" that has you ruling over mortals with a little help from a giant cow monster.	8
Battlefield 1942	EA Games	Multiplayer shooter set in WWII that lets you jump in and out of vehicles (even planes!) while battling dozens of your friends.	9
Civilization III	Infogrames	Sid Meier's classic just keeps rolling along, getting bigger and more complex while somehow managing to remain just as addictive.	10
Commandos 2	Eidos	Control a squad of elite commandos in WWII as they infiltrate, detonate, and assassinate across multiple battlefields.	8
Day of Defeat	Activision	You won't need to upgrade your videocard to play this teamplay-focused WWII shooter. What a refreshing concept.	8
Diablo II: Lords of Destruction	Blizzard	The sequel to the ultimate dungeon-crawling clickfest should please anyone who wasted their teens playing the first game.	8
Dungeon Siege	Microsoft	Hack and slash doesn't have to be complicated. Sometimes, it can even be in beautiful 3D with no loading time between levels.	8
Enemy Engaged: Comanche vs. Hokum	Empire Int.	Extremely realistic chopper sim that's not for the weak of heart or impatient of trigger finger.	9
EverQuest	Sony Online	The massively multiplayer RPG that's so addictive, it makes crack look like Sanka. Play this game at your own risk.	9
EverQuest: Scars of Velious	Sony Online	The expansion pack to EverCrack opens up new worlds, new characters, and tigers with boobies (finally!).	9
Fallout Tactics	Interplay	Squad-based tactical strategy game set in the same universe as the classic <i>Fallout</i> RPG that sets a new standard.	9
Freedon Force	EA Games	Clever use of strategy and RPG elements help make this witty comic-book superhero-themed game one of the best.	10
Freelancer	Microsoft	It's not as simtastic as some might expect a PC space-shooter to be, but that's part of its charm. Random missions keep the fun going.	8
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	Ubi Soft	This top-notch mission pack makes a decent modern combat simulation into an outstanding one.	8
Giants: Citizen Kabuto	Interplay	A shooter/strategy hybrid full of weird British humor, unique and beautiful 3D graphics, and naked lady sea monsters.	9
Grand Prix 4	Infogrames	It's a tough choice for Formula One fans; GP4 and F1 2002 are both worthy of your hard-earned dollars.	9
Grand Theft Auto III	Rockstar Games	The poster child for all that's wrong in gaming is chock full of all that's fun in gaming. And you get to import your own MP3s.	10
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	The PC version of the hit game sports a higher resolution, custom MP3 soundtracks, and mouse-look for easier killin'.	10
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	An almost-perfect blend of action and stealth, it's a humongous improvement over the first game.	9
IL-2 Sturmovik	Ubi Soft	Amazingly realistic WWII flight sim covering a region seldom visited in computer games: the Eastern Front	9
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	Yeah, the lightsaber battles are sweet, but Lando's cameo just about seals the deal. And is his ship fly or what?	9
Kohan: Ahriman's Gift	Strategy First	Surprisingly accessible fantasy-themed real-time strategy that's as much fun in single player as it is against other mages online.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive Owner's mode.	9
Max Payne	G.O.D.	Despite some corny writing, this überhip noir videogame feels like a movie, but plays like a great action game.	8
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault	EA Games	Worth it just for the incredibly intense D-Day mission that almost matches the same scene in <i>Saving Private Ryan</i> .	9
Medieval: Total War	Activision	The ultimate historical strategy game has everything from political intrigue to sweeping real-time battles.	9
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Bethesda	The definitive, open-ended RPG epic. Sort of like GTA3, but with magic and elves and all that D&D flava.	9
Motocross Madness 2	Microsoft	It's mud-splattering, off-road supercross fun with this free-wheeling dirt bike simulator from the makers of <i>ATV Offroad Fury</i> .	9
Myth III: The Wolf Age	G.O.D.	Bungie's renowned magical real-time strategy title goes 3D and maintains its fantastic multiplayer reputation.	8
NASCAR Racing 2003	Vivendi Universal	It's the final installment of the series, and it's also the best. There's not much new, but everything's been tweaked to near perfection.	9
Neverwinter Nights	Infogrames	If you're a D&D nerd, then you already know, but buy this one especially for the multiplayer and user-made mods.	9
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	Atari	This Neverwinter Nights expansion has almost enough content to qualify as a new game itself.	
No One Lives Forever	Vivendi Universal	Austin Powers ain't got nothing on Cate Archer, the hottest digital chick with a gun since that old hag Lara Croft.	9
No One Lives Forever 2	Vivendi Universal	As funny and stylish as the original '60s spy spoof (if that's even possible) and more fun to play, too.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis	Codemasters	The first in the highly original series of combat sims, this soldier/flight/tank sim went on to win CGW's 2001 Game of the Year award.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Red Hammer	Codemasters	Letting you play as the bad guys is the sure way into our hearts. Especially when they're nasty Roosties.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Resistance	Codemasters	Features and content worthy of a brand-new game, this is a benchmark expansion for a classic overlooked game.	9
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	The command interface and character AI have been revamped, but it runs slowly on anything but a high-end rig.	8
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	It's not the greatest RTS game we've played, but the nation-building aspect makes <i>Rise of Nations</i> especially appealing.	8
Sacrifice	Interplay	Action/strategy hybrid defies the conventions of all the genres it touches, while making for a fantastically original multiplayer experience.	8
Serious Sam	G.O.D.	Brainless running and gunning is an underappreciated way to waste a couple hours with a great-looking game.	8
Shadowbane	Ubi Soft	Because of these silly things called laws, the only way we can attack and capture neighboring cities is through Shadowbane. Look out.	8
Sid Meier's Sim Golf	EA Games	<i>Sim Golf</i> will have you laying out golf courses and building resorts like a virtual Robert Trent Jones.	8
The Sims	EA Games	It's impossible to categorize EA's addictive superblockbuster life simulator, just like it's impossible to stop playing it.	10
The Sims: Hot Date	EA Games	Gamers everywhere, rejoice! Finally, a game where you can actually learn a thing or two about interacting with the opposite sex!	9
Unreal II: The Awakening	Infogrames	Somewhat of a letdown in terms of story and gameplay, but good nonetheless. Call us in five years when our gaming rigs can handle it.	8
Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne	Vivendi Universal	Adds a single-player campaign to Warcraft III that isn't so moody and serious. There are some new multiplayer units as well.	
Warlords Battlecry II	Ubi Soft	RTS and RPG, two great flavors that go great together—especially when stirred together with a big gnarly wizard's staff!	8

[BUY!]

ALIENS VS. PREDATOR 2

→ Fox Interactive's AVP is an atmospheric bug hunt in which gamers can play as marines, aliens, or the deadly predator. This superior sequel offers an improved story line, enhanced gameplay, and the ability to save anytime, anywhere.



[AVOID!]

RED FACTION II

→ Featuring that fancy (yet intermittently effective) Geo-mod technology, THQ's sci-fi FPS makes for a bit of a blast...on a console. Substandard graphics and the absence of multiplayer modes mean this afterthought's not worth your while.



XBOX TOP 50 AW. SHOOT

Apex	Atari	This racer is fantastic to look at and plays well enough to sit snugly between <i>Project Gotham Racing</i> and <i>Gran Turismo</i> on your shelf.	8
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	Vivendi Universal	A beautiful-looking <i>Dungeons & Dragons</i> -based hack-and-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	An arcade racer with an emphasis on spectacular crashes, which—now that we think about it—defeats the purpose of competitive racing.	8
Cel Damage	Microsoft	Crazy cartoon car combat with great use of cel-shading and varied multiplayer options. It can quickly become repetitive, however.	8
Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	Everybody's favorite rally racer, Colin McRae, has a brand-new game featuring finely tuned physics and car damage.	8
Crazy Taxi 3: High Roller	Sega	It's hard to improve upon the original, but that didn't stop Sega from trying. Twice. The setting is new, but it plays pretty much the same.	8
Dead or Alive 3	Tecmo	It's not the deepest of fighters, but it definitely competes for the best-looking prize. Plus, the girls are back in all their bouncy glory.	8
Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball	Tecmo	Pro tip: When playing <i>DOA</i> , have your TV remote close by. If Mom bursts in, hit the surf button and flip to the History Channel. She'll be proud.	8
ESPN NFL Football	Sega	The new first-person mode is an interesting addition to a solid game of football, but it's still not enough to top <i>Madden</i> .	8
Fatal Frame	Tecmo	It's creepy. It's gory. It's the Tecmo game without the boobs. Another of those games better enjoyed with the lights off.	8
Halo	Microsoft	The definitive reason to own an Xbox. There are plenty of secondary reasons, sure, but no Xbox owner should be without <i>Halo</i> .	10
High Heat 2004	3DO	The best ball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	9
James Bond 007: NightFire	EA Games	<i>GoldenEye</i> set an impossibly high standard for the Bond license, but <i>NightFire</i> does an admirable job of re-creating the feel of the films.	8
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	<i>Jet Set Radio Future</i> has substance and an overabundance of style. Sega simplified tagging in favor of a more robust trick system.	8
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive Owner's mode.	9
Max Payne	Rockstar Games	The bullet-time effect is the big draw of this action/shooter. Inspired by Hong Kong action flicks, set against a gritty New York City.	8
MechAssault	Microsoft	It's a good single-player game, but it really shines on Xbox Live, where you're pitted against other mech pilots.	8
Medal of Honor: Frontline	EA Games	A strong single-player campaign paves the way across the beaches of Normandy and through the heart of France. Great audio.	8
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	Includes the original <i>MGS2: Sons of Liberty</i> , five brand-new missions featuring Solid Snake, and a slew of challenging VR missions.	9
Midnight Club II	Rockstar Games	Slightly better than Microsoft's <i>Midtown Madness</i> , although both are worthy additions to your library—especially if you have Xbox Live.	8
MotoGP 2	THQ	What we said: "Can only be described as the best motorcycle-racing sim on the planet." What more do you need?	9
NASCAR Thunder 2003	EA Sports	Hate driving left for hours? NASCAR games probably aren't your thing. But if you get it, <i>Thunder 2003</i> should be right up your alley.	9
NBA 2K3	Sega Sports	Yet another compelling reason to sign up for Xbox Live, <i>NBA2K3</i> is the best-playing game of hoops on the system.	9
NBA Live 2003	EA Sports	An improvement over previous versions, with a heavier focus on the faster-paced aspects of the game as opposed to a true simulation.	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, <i>Vol. 2</i> takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent <i>NCAA 2003</i> , added some new blocking and pass defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
NCAA College Basketball 2K3	Sega	We're secretly hoping next year's version features an NCAA Rules Infraction mode. Think of the possibilities....	9
Outlaw Volleyball	Simon & Schuster	It's like <i>NBA Jam</i> on the beach, only with far less clothing and class. Play it online for extra fun.	8
Panzer Dragoon Orta	Sega	Aesthetically beautiful and a dream to play. See what Saturn owners were enjoying seven years ago (the original <i>Panzer Dragoon</i> is included).	9
Phantom Crash	Phantagram	Xbox certainly isn't lacking in mech titles. The quirky, unique <i>Phantom Crash</i> has upgradeable mechs and a story-driven one-player mode.	9
Project Gotham Racing	Microsoft	The refinement of the Kudos point system is the biggest difference between <i>Project Gotham</i> and its Dreamcast predecessor.	8
RallySport Challenge	Microsoft	This rally racer is one of the best examples of Xbox's power. More arcade than simulation, with enough depth to please both camps.	8
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War	Activision	The single-player missions still aren't much to write home about, but at least you can play them with a pal. The online play is gray.	8
Robotech Battlecry	TDK Mediactive	Cel-shaded graphics effectively capture the look and feel of the classic 1980s cartoon. Especially enjoyable for fans of the series.	8
Sega GT 2002	Sega	Sega's answer to the <i>Gran Turismo</i> phenomenon. Not quite as expansive in terms of tracks and cars, but better with the details.	8
Shenmue II	Microsoft	The second chapter of Yu Suzuki's opus sees our hero Ryo traversing the streets of Hong Kong in search of his father's killer.	7
Silent Hill 2: Restless Dreams	Konami	A creepy port of a creepy game with a creepy bonus: a creepy extra episode of the creepy story. Play without lights for extra creepiness.	8
Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	As usual, the <i>Star Wars</i> universe inspires great aesthetic design to complement Raven Software's solid sense of game design.	8
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	The best thing to happen to the <i>Star Wars</i> franchise since <i>The Empire Strikes Back</i> , and the best RPG we've played in years.	10
Steel Battalion	Capcom	If you want to play this game, you have to shell out \$200 for the massive controller. For those with the cash, it's well worth it.	8
Soul Calibur 2	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as <i>VF4: Evolution</i> .	9
Test Drive	Atari	Race for pink slips on the underground circuit and live out your Vin Diesel role-playing fantasy. Or just act normal and race cars.	8
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Bethesda	An exhaustive open-ended RPG that essentially allows you to make it up as you go along, with hundreds of people to talk to.	8
TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Everything good about the (PS2) original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options including maps, weapons, and game modes.	8
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Ubi Soft	There's not much of a graphical upgrade from the PC version, but the interface and audio are improved. Goes great with Xbox Live.	8
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	Comparisons to <i>Metal Gear Solid</i> were inevitable. <i>Splinter Cell</i> holds its own, and even outdoes Konami's behemoth at times.	9
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	Activision	If you have to have <i>Tony Hawk 3</i> , improved graphics and framerate and the custom soundtrack option make this the best version to get.	9
Unreal Championship	Atari	Mindless deathmatching with great weapon design and entertaining multiplayer modes, including the sport-like Bombing Run.	8
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sports title that manages to make the <i>Tony Hawk</i> formula work on water. Watch out for the gators.	9
World Series Baseball 2K3	Sega Sports	WSB2K3 is the best-looking baseball game and it has a great Franchise mode, but it's got A.I. issues that still need to be worked out.	8

[BUY!]

BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE

→ Dungeon crawling never looked this good. *Dark Alliance* is like *Guild Wars* reborn with some truly slick graphics (look at the water—it's alive!), amazing lighting effects, and cool character models. Oh, and the combat is top-notch, too. Did we mention that?



[AVOID!]

GROUP S CHALLENGE

→ It's an ugly racing game that has no online play, and with *Midtown Madness 3* and *Midnight Club 2* available, there's really no reason to add *Group S* to your garage. That'd be like buying a Pinto when you can get a Civic and Maxima.



→ GAMECUBE TOP 50 TIME TO WAKE UP

All-Star Baseball 2004	Acclaim	The graphics keep getting better each year, but the gameplay isn't keeping pace. Nice presentation, but the batting interface needs work.	7
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	The game that never ends is based largely on routine chores, yard work, and interior decorating. So, why is it so much fun to play?	9
Beach Spikers	Sega	Easy to pick up and easy to play, like <i>Virtua Tennis</i> . As with most arcade sports games, it's definitely better as a multiplayer affair.	8
Bomberman Generation	Majesco	A surviving member of the Old School, <i>Bomberman</i> has earned some tenure in the industry. This time, he sports a cel-shaded look.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	The best-looking—and best-playing—racer on the system. Be prepared to spend many hours in Crash mode.	8
Cubivore	Atmos	A simple but compelling game of reproduction and cannibalism. Plus, you can get Hump points. You know you're interested.	7
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	Acclaim	Before turning to Larry Flynt for inspiration, <i>XXX</i> was based on the well-mannered Dave Mirra and actually focused on—get this—biking.	8
Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem	Nintendo	This game, if you let it, will mess with your head. The insanity effects are clever (the first time) and the scenery is downright creepy.	8
FIFA 2002	Electronic Arts	Although there's always room for improvement, EA's soccer series has been fairly decent. Plus, there's no real alternative yet.	7
Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee	Atari	Godzilla & Co. wrecking cityscapes and each other, with support for up to four players. What's not to like?	7
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	EA Games	This Potter kid seems to be pretty popular, so the folks at EA decided to make a <i>Zelda</i> -esque adventure based on his magical exploits.	7
High Heat 2004	3DO	The best ball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	9
The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	It looks and feels like the best <i>Zelda</i> game ever, but sailing back and forth in the overworld just feels like work.	9
Luigi's Mansion	Nintendo	We all wanted <i>Mario</i> at launch, and we got this. Like getting socks for Christmas, it's good and comfortable, but not what we wanted.	7
Madden NFL 2002	Electronic Arts	Those who bought the GameCube version instead of the PS2 edition were treated to roughly the same game. Good for them, though.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive Owner's mode.	9
Mario Party 4	Nintendo	There are few things better in life than three friends, <i>Mario Party</i> , and a healthy flow of alcoholic beverages (if you're legal, of course).	8
Medal of Honor: Frontline	EA Games	A new story of D-Day and the ensuing action on the French front lines. The GameCube version has a multiplayer mode the others don't.	7
Metroid Prime	Nintendo	As if they dissected <i>Super Metroid</i> , added a dimension, and put it back together again with slick graphics. In fact, it's exactly like that.	10
MLB Slugfest 20-04	Midway	What <i>Blitz</i> is to football, <i>Slugfest</i> is to baseball. If you can't sit through nine innings of the regular game, this one's for you.	7
NASCAR Thunder 2003	EA Games	It's apparently the fastest growing "sport" in America, and <i>Thunder 2003</i> is packed under the hood, including an in-depth Career mode.	9
NBA 2K2	Sega	More of a sim than <i>NBA Courtside</i> , but it's the best basketball simulation available. Includes a great game of street ball, too.	9
NBA 2K3	Sega	Added to this year's version is a slick ESPN interface, an upgraded Franchise mode, and a fresh class of rookies.	9
NBA Courtside	Nintendo	No longer under the Nintendo development umbrella, Left Field's final installment of the <i>Courtside</i> series is a worthy b-ball game.	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	EA Sports	Even better than the first, <i>Vol. 2</i> takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent <i>NCAA 2003</i> , added some new blocking and pass defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II	Sega	Unhealthily addictive. The pursuit of rare items helps one ignore the somewhat repetitive battle (and the \$9 monthly fee).	9
Pikmin	Nintendo	<i>Mario</i> creator Shigeru Miyamoto got the idea for this quirky strategy game from observing his personal garden. What kind of garden?	8
Resident Evil	Capcom	This remake could almost be described as a new game. But is it really <i>Resident Evil</i> without the laughably bad voice acting?	9
Resident Evil 0	Capcom	This one actually is a brand-new game, with significant changes such as droppable items and the dirty-sounding partner swapping.	8
Sega Soccer Slam	Sega	An arcade-style soccer game with off-the-wall characters, arenas, and power-ups. And it's still better than <i>Virtua Striker</i> !	8
Skies of Arcadia: Legend	Sega	If you missed it on Dreamcast—and many of you did—you've been given a second chance. It's even got new characters.	8
Smuggler's Run: Warzones	Rockstar Games	An enhanced version of <i>Smuggler's Run</i> , with new vehicles and maps and an expanded multiplayer mode with support for four players.	8
Sonic Adventure 2: Battle	Sega	Remember when you and your friends held daily <i>Sonic</i> vs. <i>Mario</i> debates? Don't you feel silly now? Or at least a little old?	7
Sonic Adventure DX	Sega	SA2 got an upgrade, while the original <i>Adventure</i> ...uh, gets a bunch of old Game Gear games. Still a classic worth revisiting, though.	7
Sonic Mega Collection	Sega	Sure, the <i>Sonic</i> games were great, but \$40 may be too steep an asking price for a collection of old and unenhanced games.	7
Soul Calibur 2	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as <i>VF4: Evolution</i> .	9
Star Fox Adventures	Nintendo	Rare's last Nintendo effort took forever, but <i>Star Fox Adventures</i> takes its inspiration from <i>The Legend of Zelda</i> —and that ain't bad.	7
Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader	LucasArts	At times, <i>Rogue Leader</i> syncs closely with scenes from the movies. Impressive when you consider it took only nine months to make.	9
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	LucasArts	All the intense action of the movie, without melodramatic writing and weak acting. As with many GC games, multiplayer is a big draw.	7
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	Maybe not quite as groundbreaking as <i>Super Mario 64</i> was, but even when Nintendo "misses," it makes a big splash.	9
Super Monkey Ball	Sega	Monkeys in balls! An exceptional game based on a simple concept; some of the later levels will eat you for lunch.	8
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Even more monkeys in balls running around for your entertainment! The extra game modes add quite a bit to the simple concept.	8
Super Smash Bros. Melee	Nintendo	A Nintendo fanatic's dream, if only for the exhaustive gallery of collectible Nintendabilia. Plus, you can beat the crap out of Jigglypuff.	9
TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Everything good about the original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options including maps, weapons, and game modes.	7
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	Activision	For those with the Dual Shock hardwired into their psyche, switching over to the oddly shaped GameCube controller can prove difficult.	9
Ultimate Muscle	Bandai	If the soap-opera antics of the WWE don't go far enough over the top, perhaps the wacky <i>Ultimate Muscle</i> will be more to your liking.	9
Wario World	Nintendo	After all this time, Wario has become quite effective at reclaiming his stolen treasure. Too effective, as <i>Wario World</i> is over far too quickly.	7
Wave Race: Blue Storm	Nintendo	Great wave physics, awesome weather effects, and a deeper control scheme than the original. An underrated gem of a racer.	8
WWE Wrestlemania X8	THQ	Ratings have cooled and Stone Cold has had some run-ins with John Law, but that's irrelevant, as wrestling games will always sell.	8

[BUY!]

RESIDENT EVIL 0

→ Hot on the heels of Capcom's reimagining of the first *Resident Evil*, this GameCube exclusive served as a prequel to the horror to come. The series' trademark B-movie thrills and chills are all here, as well as the archaic controls. But golly, those graphics!



[AVOID!]

CHARLIE'S ANGELS

→ Do we really need to say why?



→ GBA TOP 50 LIST!

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	BMR RATING
Advance Wars	Nintendo	Turn-based military strategy that should be a part of everyone's GBA library. Once you get sucked in, it's hard to pull yourself away.	8
Advance Wars 2	Nintendo	Wars 2 only adds a single new unit, but it's chock full of new maps, new terrain, and new CO powers.	8
Baseball Advance	THQ	There are only four stadiums and no multiplayer, but it's still a great game of baseball.	8
Breath of Fire 2	Capcom	It's a port of the old SNES RPG, but we'd be willing to bet that quite a few of you missed it the first time. Don't repeat that mistake!	7
Car Battler Joe	Natsume	A fun and unique Car-PG that lets you build cars, add parts and weapons, and travel the world in search of your father.	7
Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow	Konami	Better sound and castle design than <i>Harmony of Dissonance</i> , but much too short. The soul system is ace, though.	8
Castlevania: Circle of the Moon	Konami	<i>Castlevania</i> is meant to be played in two dimensions, and this game shows why. A complex card system governs your special abilities.	9
Castlevania: Harmony of Dissonance	Konami	The second <i>Castlevania</i> is one of the best reasons to own a Game Boy Advance. The colors are brighter and the bosses are bigger.	9
Chu Chu Rocket!	Sega	A highly addictive and highly cute puzzle action game from Sega that's best played with multiple friends. Mouse mania!	7
F-Zero: Maximum Velocity	Nintendo	A new F-Zero based on the classic SNES game, with improved graphics, new tracks, and four-player support.	8
Final Fight One	Capcom	Another enhanced port of an SNES original. How come mayors of large cities don't go on ass-kicking rampages anymore?	8
Golden Sun	Nintendo	A deep combat engine and brilliant graphics make this one of the better RPGs available on GBA.	8
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Picks up right where the first one left off. The battle system remains basically unchanged, but the puzzles are much more rewarding.	8
Gradius Galaxies	Konami	Konami's classic shooter series translates to the portable very well. Great graphics and plenty of challenge.	7
GT Advance 3	THQ	The GT Advance series has always been technically marvelous, and GT3 (yeah, we know) finally has a battery-save function!	8
Guilty Gear X Advance	Sammy	Not surprisingly, the animation and soundtrack take a hit, but it still plays like its big brother versions.	7
Iridion II	Majesco	The first <i>Iridion</i> served as a neat technical demo, but its sequel concentrates more on having good gameplay. Another quality shooter.	7
Kirby: Nightmare in Dreamland	Nintendo	A remake of the NES classic <i>Kirby's Adventure</i> with updated graphics and multiplayer support.	8
Klonoa: Empire of Dreams	Namco	Straying from the original formula, this <i>Klonoa</i> is more of a puzzle game than a platformer, with great graphics and sound.	8
Konami Krazy Racers	Konami	A <i>Mario Kart</i> -esque mascot racer filled with classic Konami characters like Dracula, Goemon, and <i>MGS</i> 's Ninja.	7
Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past	Nintendo	Invite three friends and you've got a bona fide <i>Zelda</i> party. Drink red medicine till you puke and skinny-dip in Lake Hylia!	9
Lufia: The Ruins of Lore	Atlus	Perennially overshadowed by Square's offerings, the <i>Lufia</i> series is just as engaging as <i>Final Fantasy</i> . It's also more challenging.	8
Lunar Legend	Ubi Soft	The anime cut-scenes and superb voice acting may be gone, but the great <i>Lunar</i> gameplay and story remain intact.	8
Mario Kart: Super Circuit	Nintendo	A balanced blend of <i>Super Mario Kart</i> and <i>Mario Kart 64</i> that even includes all the tracks from the former.	8
Mega Man and Bass	Capcom	It's hard, so very hard. But what <i>Mega Man</i> game isn't? Play as either Mega Man or Wily robot Bass; each one has different abilities.	7
Mega Man Battle Network 2	Capcom	More of an RPG than a platformer, the <i>Battle Network</i> series is a nice change of pace for <i>Mega Man</i> and pals.	7
Mega Man Battle Network 3	Capcom	<i>Battle Network 3</i> is pretty much more of the same with a few minor additions, but it's already a great series.	8
Mega Man Zero	Capcom	A difficult yet engaging installment of the X side story played as Zero, who is equipped with an arm cannon and beam saber.	7
Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	The follow-up to <i>Super Metroid</i> is eight years late, but the wait was well worth it. An adventure that ends way too quickly.	9
Ninja Five-O	Konami	A challenging platformer that brings back fond memories of <i>Bionic Commando</i> . Complete with throwing stars and katanas.	7
Phantasy Star Collection	THQ	Straightforward classic RPG action that's been overlooked for far too long. Includes <i>Phantasy Star 1, 2, and 3</i> .	9
Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire	Nintendo	Aside from 2-on-2 battles, the first GBA <i>Pokémon</i> combo doesn't really change the original formula.	7
Rayman Advance	Ubi Soft	<i>Rayman</i> is just as good in 2D as he is in 3D. It looks great and provides a decent challenge.	8
Sonic Advance 2	THQ	<i>Sonic Advance 2</i> is much improved over the first one, and it connects to GameCube's <i>Sonic Adventure</i> games to boot.	8
Sonic Pinball Party	Sega	Not limited to just hedgehogs, Sega's solid pinball features tables from the classics <i>Nights</i> and <i>Samba de Amigo</i> .	8
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Capcom	Sure, the limiting button configuration prevents <i>SFA3</i> from being a completely accurate port, but it's great nonetheless.	8
Super Dodgeball Advance	Atlus	You're not going to find that many dodgeball games on the market, so thankfully this one is worthwhile. Better in multiplayer.	7
Super Ghouls & Ghosts	Capcom	Remember how frustrated you got playing through <i>Ghouls & Ghosts</i> ? Get ready to do it all over again.	8
Super Mario Advance: Super Mario 2	Nintendo	Aside from the odd naming system, you can't really complain about a portable version of <i>Super Mario Bros. 2</i> .	8
Super Mario Advance 2: Mario World	Nintendo	There's really not much else that can be said except "portable <i>Super Mario World</i> " and "you should buy it."	9
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	<i>Yoshi</i> is the star of this show, one of the greatest 2D platformers ever put to silicon. There are even a couple of new bonus levels.	9
Super Monkey Ball Jr.	THQ	An excellent port of the game that sold many a GameCube. THQ even included Monkey Bowling and Monkey Fight!	8
Super Puzzle Fighter II	Capcom	Sometimes, you just get bored with <i>Tetris</i> . <i>Puzzle Fighter II</i> is a fantastic port of a fantastic and highly addictive game. Buy it now.	8
Super Street Fighter II	Capcom	The combo of <i>SFA3</i> , <i>Guilty Gear X Advance</i> , and <i>Super Street Fighter II</i> is devastating. And you don't even need any quarters!	8
Tactics Ogre: The Knights of Lodis	Atlus	An incredibly deep strategy RPG with a branching story line and a rewarding battle system.	8
The Lost Vikings	Blizzard	Blizzard's classic puzzler finds new life, but without any of the extras or enhancements one might expect.	7
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	Activision	It's amazing how Activision managed to cram <i>Tony Hawk</i> into a cartridge while keeping the essence of the console version intact.	9
Virtua Tennis	THQ	A surprisingly faithful rendition of the console versions with good visuals and an engaging World Tour mode. The best tennis on GBA.	8
Wario Land 4	Nintendo	The <i>Wario</i> series of platformers has always been excellent, and this one is no exception. Short but incredibly sweet.	8
Wario Ware, Inc.	Nintendo	A large collection of microgames fuels <i>Wario Ware</i> 's madcap mayhem. The freshest game we've seen in a long time.	9

[BUY!]

NINJA FIVE-0

→ Released to little fanfare, Konami's ode to the classic days of side-scrolling action features shuriken throwing, hostage rescuing, and grappling à la *Bionic Commando*. Classically challenging, evocatively nostalgic, surprisingly satisfying.



[AVOID!]

MORTAL KOMBAT ADVANCE

→ Let's face it, kids: *Mortal Kombat*'s main draw—the digitized blood and gore—really doesn't translate well to handhelds. More to the point, this appalling brawler takes the best bits of the console and arcade versions and promptly sucks out their soul.



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